

Environmental spy



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NOV. 1952

SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

NOV. 25¢

THE
TIMELESS
ONES

by
ERIC FRANK
RUSSELL

132
PAGES



SCIENCE FICTION
MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES NEW
No Reprints

"How I Became a Hotel Hostess"



Mrs. Helen V. Roberts
Now Succeeding in Position as Hostess-Assistant Director, Without Previous Hotel Experience

"Lewis advertisements always held my attention and I hoped some day to be able to take their course. The time came at middle age, when I found it possible to do

what I wanted.

After graduating, I accepted the position of Hostess-Assistant Director at the YWCA Resident Hotel here in Honolulu.

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"Right about the time I decided to build a more substantial, dependable career for myself, I saw a Lewis advertisement, sent for the booklet and enrolled.

I was proud the day I obtained my first position as manager of this hotel in New York. The future looks bright with ever-increasing pay and opportunities assured. I owe my success to Lewis Training."

STEP INTO a WELL-PAID HOTEL POSITION

Well-paid, important positions, ever-increasing opportunities and a sound, substantial future await trained men and women in essential hotels, clubs, restaurants, defense housing, officers' and service clubs. Lewis graduates "making good" as Managers, Assistant Managers, Executive Housekeepers, Hostesses, and in 55 other types of well-paid positions.

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Washington 7, D. C.

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YEAR

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CityZoneState

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Without cost or obligation, please send me the booklet about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

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- ☐ Auto-Elec. Technician
- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
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AVIATION

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- ☐ Aircraft Engine Mechanic
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- ☐ Arch. Drafting
- ☐ Building Contractor
- ☐ Estimating
- ☐ Carpenter and Mill Work
- ☐ Carpenter Foreman
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
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Stationary Steam Engineering

- ☐ Stationary Engineer
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Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

Nov.
1952

SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

Number
1
Volume
2

132 PAGES OF NEW STORIES — NO REPRINTS!

Featuring

The Timeless Ones

By Eric Frank Russell 12

Is it possible to conquer without battle, deceit, or even
desire for conquest?



Seven Complete Stories

- THE CAPTIVE AUDIENCE (Novelet)** Larry Shaw 26
Reeder's an amateur, and he finds this is a job for experts.
- DEFENDER OF THE FAITH** Alfred Coppel 59
Jere wants to be a woman, but she has a mission to fulfill.
- THE PROWLER (Novelet)** William C. Bailey 68
Condon plays a deadly game with destiny, when he sees . . .
- SCENT OF DANGER** William Morrison & Harry Nix 89
Now, if man's limited senses could be extended . . .
- SIGNPOST IN THE SKY** W. Malcolm White 101
Fenton follows the markers floating in space to . . .
- THE LAST ROBOT** Richard Terzian 106
Suddenly, they started to dismantle themselves, one by one . . .
- HORATIO, THE CREATOR** Francis L. Fugate 107
Clarke had only one defect as a writer—which he corrected!

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(Special Article) Robert A. Madle & Sam Moskowitz 81
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Cover by Milton Lueros, from "Defender of the Faith"
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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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As part of my Communications Course I send you parts to build the low power Broadcasting Transmitter shown at the right. Use it to get practical experience putting a station "on the air," perform procedures required of Broadcast Station operators. You build many other pieces of equipment with kits I send. I train you for your FCC Commercial Operator's License.



J. E. Smith
has trained more than
100,000 men
through other men



YOU PRACTICE SERVICING with Kits I Send You

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Will Train You at Home to be a RADIO-TELEVISION Technician

TELEVISION

Today's Good Job Maker

TV now reaches from coast-to-coast. Over 15 million TV sets are now in use; 108 TV stations are operating and 1800 new TV stations have been authorized. This means more jobs, good pay jobs with bright futures. Now is the time to get ready for success in TV. Find out what Radio-Television offers you. Mail coupon now for my 2 Books FREE!

America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You Good Pay, Success

Do you want a good pay job, a bright future, security? Then get into the fast growing RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Most had no previous experience, many no more than grammar school education. Keep your job while training at home. Learn RADIO-TELEVISION principles from easy-to-understand lessons. Get practical experience on actual equipment you build with parts I send you.

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The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS that show you how to service neighbors' Radios in spare time while training. Use MULTITESTER you build to help service sets, get practical experience working on circuits common to both Radio and Television. Find out how you can realize your ambition to be successful in the prosperous RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Even without Television, the industry is bigger than ever before. 105 million home and auto Radios, over 2900 Radio Stations, expanding Aviation and Police Radio, Micro-Wave Relay, FM and Television are making opportunities for Servicing and Communications Technicians.

Mail Coupon—Find Out What Radio-TV Offers You

Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Cut out and mail coupon below. Send in envelope or paste on postal. You will get actual Servicing Lesson to prove it's practical to learn at home. You'll also receive my 64-page Book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Read what my graduates are doing, earning, see photos of equipment you practice with at home. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. EMT National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

Good for Both—FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. EMT
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book,
"How to Be a Success in Radio-Television."
Both FREE. (No salesman will call. Please
write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....
Address.....
City..... Zone..... State.....
Approved Under G. I. Bill

The ABC's of
SERVICING

How to Be a
Success
in RADIO-
TELEVISION

NRI Training Leads to Good Jobs Like These

Broadcasting: Chief Technician, Chief Operator, Power Monitor, Recording Operator, Remote Control Operator, Servicing: Home and Auto Radios, P.A. Systems, Television Receivers, Electronic Controls, FM Radios. In Radio Plants: Design Assistant, Transmitter Design Technician, Tester, Serviceman, Service Manager, Ship and Harbor Radio: Chief Operator, Assistant Operator, Radiotelephone Operator, Government Radio: Operator in Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Forestry Service Dispatcher, Airways Radio Operator, Aviation Radio: Transmitter Technician, Receiver Technician, Airport Transmitter Operator. Television: Pick-up Operator, Voice Transmitter Operator, Television Technician, Remote Control Operator, Service and Maintenance Technician.

I TRAINED THESE MEN

Has Growing Business

"I am becoming an expert Technician as well as a Radiotechnician. Without your practical course I feel this would have been impossible. My business continues to grow."
—Philip G. Dregan, Louisville, Ky.

Good Work with Station

"I am Broadcast Engineer at WLFM. Another technician and I have opened a Radio-TV service shop in our spare time. Big TV sales here. As a result we have more work than we can handle."
—J. H. Burleigh, Jr., Suffolk, Va.

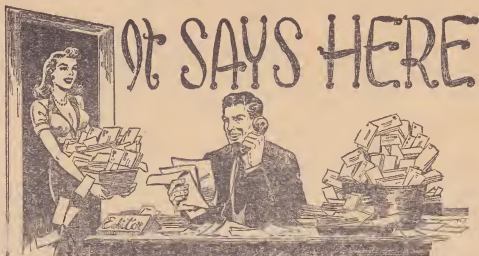
Praises NRI as Best Course

"I was a high school student when I enrolled. My friends began to bring their Radios to me. I really need a profit of \$300 by the time I completed the course."
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"My first job was operator with KDLR, obtained for me by your Graduate Service Dept. I am now Chief Engineer in charge of Radio Equipment for Police and Fire Department."
—T. S. Norton, Hamilton, Ohio.

Tested Way to Better Pay



A Department For Science - Fictionists

As I Was Saying...

IT ISN'T only the heat that gives your editor a warm glow on this late June afternoon as I type out the editorial for Volume Two, Number One of SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY. Part of the glow comes from satisfaction—a reflection of the appreciation that you, the readers, have shown of our efforts in trying to make this magazine one you want to keep on your “must” list. Both your support and your letters have shown that we seem to have made a rather good start in this direction.

As with the “girlie cover” angle, it wasn't a flood of letters at any one time, but a steady insistence on your part that brought results, and has now encouraged us to make the next step. From the first issue, there were letters asking for more frequent publication—in addition to other matters you wanted.

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY has lived up to our hopes and has turned out to be a selling title. Now, obviously, we can't issue this magazine every other month without changing the title—and something like SCIENCE FICTION BI-MONTHLY

doesn't have much *zing* to it. So, we're doing the next best thing.

One month after this issue appears on the stands, you'll see the initial number of DYNAMIC SCIENCE FICTION.

Like SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, the new title will contain 132 Pages, use only new and complete stories, and sell for 25 cents per copy. Unlike SFQ, DYNAMIC SCIENCE FICTION will have the benefit of a year and a half's experience gained from the magazine you're now reading; authors, illustrators, and your editor have learned quite a few important things from your response to Volume One of SFQ, and we hope and believe that our new publication will show definite signs of it.

You've seen, from reading this magazine, that some things you wanted (and which your editor would very much like to have given you) were not feasible when you first asked for them; other items are not feasible yet. But there may be a number of

[Turn To Page 8]

Picture Appears On Paper For You To Trace!

DRAW instantly

NO EXPERIENCE!
NO TALENT!
NO LESSONS!
NO SKILL NEEDED!

NOW you can easily draw people, animals, or still life, or maps like an artist even if you have never drawn a straight line before.

Now you can easily copy any picture and you can easily enlarge or reduce anything you wish to draw. Students get better school marks with it.

DRAW ANY TYPE OF DRAWING



This amazing new invention makes it easy for anyone to draw instantly!!



ONLY
\$1.98
COMPLETE

Now, anyone from 5 to 90 can easily draw, paint, or sketch almost anything quickly and accurately the very first time you use the Master Art Helper. You draw like a professional artist even if you have never drawn before. Thousands who were told they were "hopeless" at drawing, now draw like professional artists, and draw those "tough" maps and paintings with ease! No matter what you want to draw with the use of the Master Art Helper. It is automatically seen on any sheet of paper, then you easily, quickly trace the picture on the paper because you already see there—and in color too! It develops children's art ability and improves their drawing technique! With the Master Art Helper you will draw an accurate professional-type drawing that anyone would think an experienced artist had drawn. This often helps students to get better grades in school! The Master Art Helper makes it easy to draw or copy anything you wish to draw larger or smaller or any size you wish, and is excellent for drawing MAPS usually required of students. It can be used easily on any table, board, or desk anywhere, at home or in school. The Master Art Helper is used to draw photographs both in-doors and out-doors. It requires absolutely no lessons or practice. If you write with a pencil you can easily draw anything with the Master Art Helper. The Master Art Helper can help you be popular and can give you lots of hours of enjoyment.

HOW IT WORKS

Simply look through the Master Art Helper and see what you want to draw right on the paper you are using. All you do is trace the drawing—like magic you have drawn a perfect professional picture!

WIN POPULARITY! BE ADMIRER!

Your friends will ask you to draw them and you will easily be able to do it. The Master Art Helper will make you popular. Thousands find that after a short time they can draw well without the Master Art Helper. It helps anyone to develop skills and artistic ability which often leads to a good paying career in art. Helps you draw window cards, maps, signs, portraits, living subjects, and used by many store keepers.

FREE!

"Easily Understood Tricks Of The Artist". This valuable illustrated booklet, "Easily Understood Tricks Of The Artist" will be included free with your Master Art Helper. This booklet will help you understand many of the techniques of the proper shading and proportion and so forth, that are used in drawing human figures and maps. And, will help you improve your drawing skill.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE. 10 DAY FREE TRIAL

If the Master Art Helper doesn't help you to draw anything you want to draw. If you can't draw people, animals, maps, figures, or anything else like a professional artist with this Master Art Helper, return it within 10 days and your money will be refunded.

Standard Model \$1.98

MASTER ART HELPER CO.

318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

Excellent for drawing required in school, office, shop, or store.

10 DAY FREE TRIAL! MAIL COUPON NOW!

MASTER ART HELPER CO. Dept. 19
318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

Rush me the Master Art Helper and your free booklet, "Easily Understood Tricks Of The Artist"

☐ I enclose \$1.98 send postage prepaid

☐ I understand I can return this merchandise after a 10 day trial and my money will be refunded.

☐ I enclose \$2.98 send Deluxe Model.

Name

Address

City Zone State

SENT ON APPROVAL

interesting aspects of a new magazine wherein you can have a hand from the very start.

I should like to hear from you on such matters. I'd like to hear what you want to see in the new magazine that you have not seen in SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY—as well as your opinion on some things you *have* seen in SFQ which you'd rather do without in a new magazine. Not only the matter of story-lengths, types of stories, specific authors or artists you do or do not like, or the question of departments, etc. I get brainstorming now and then, and try them out—but I wouldn't insult anyone's intelligence by pretending that I've thought of everything, or am capable of thinking of everything. Never mind whether your pet idea is “feasible”; that's our worry. I want to hear it, nonetheless.

I can't guarantee that we'll take all the suggestions offered, or even all the good suggestions at the very beginning. But I do want to hear them.

So let me hear from you: I promise to read all letters that are legible, and if any particularly good ones reach me in time, I'll run them in our first issue. It's something of a trick to have a letter-department in Volume One, Number One of a magazine, but it's been done before—and I'll confess I always liked to see it back in the old days when I was just a reader and “fan”, and knew a hell of a lot more about editing than I do now. (The longer I work at it, the more I wonder at how I could have forgotten all the sterling knowledge I had back in those days.)

That isn't a rap at the armchair editors—without the interest, and frequently-excellent suggestions and ideas letter-writers have been coming up with during the twenty-odd years of magazine science fiction, the current crop would be far different than it is today—and the differences would not be good ones. Western, Detective, Sports, Love, etc., pulp magazines are edited in the dark, as it were; only circulation figures can show if the

editor and art department is on the right track, so far as satisfying the cash-customers goes. True, some publishers have made surveys, but there's a lot of difference between one survey—no matter how scientifically conducted—and issue to issue reports, coming steadily in healthy numbers. Sales fall off, let us say (shuddering); why did it happen? Was it due to some “seasonal slump”? (There are certain times of the year when magazines generally sell less copies at other times, regardless of content.) Is there something wrong with the magazine—and if so *what*? These other pulps receive an occasional letter of praise, or complaint, about a particular item. But when we have letters coming in after *every* issue, there can be *some* sort of a tie-in made between the responses of readers and the sales; it isn't complete, it often isn't accurate, but it does give the editor a little to go on.

After the first issue, of course, you readers will decide which are the best letters in the letter-department of our new title, and we'll send originals to the ones letter-writers select. But for the letters I've just mentioned, I'll pick the winners—the three best letters containing good suggestions I can use right away, or in the near future.

Elsewhere in this issue, we have ads announcing DYNAMIC SCIENCE FICTION, so look on pages 67 and 117 for more details.

THE “ALL THE ANSWERS” CONTEST

Astonishingly, no one has yet come up with a correct statement of the basic flaw in Rog Phillips' “solution” to the problem he posed in “All the Answers”, although I'm delighted with the volume of discussion that story has brought forth. It's the kind of story I like—chock full of debatable points, but one that held me (and,

[Turn To Page 10]

**Build a Fine Business... Full or Spare Time!
We Start You FREE—Don't Invest One Cent!**

MAKE BIG MONEY

WITH FAST-SELLING WARM

MASON LEATHER JACKETS

Rush Coupon for FREE Selling Outfit!

NOW IT'S EASY to make BIG MONEY in a profit-making, spare-time business! As our man in your community, you feature Mason's fast-selling Horsehide, Capeskin, Suede, other fine leather jackets—nationally known for smart styling, rugged wear, wonderful warmth. Start by selling to friends and fellow workers. Think of all the outdoor workers around your own home who will be delighted to buy these fine jackets from you. truck drivers, milkmen, cab drivers, gas station, construction men—hundreds in your own community! You'll be amazed how quickly business grows. And no wonder!—You offer these splendid jackets at low money-saving prices people can afford! Our top-notch men find it's easy to make up to \$10.00 a day EXTRA income!

SHOE AND LEATHER JACKETS ARE BOTH
LINED WITH WARM SHEEPSKIN!

These Special Features Help You Make Money From First Hour!

... Men really go for these warm Mason jackets of long-lasting Pony Horsehide leather, fine Capeskin leather, soft luxurious Suede leather. You can even take orders for Nylon, Gabardine, 100% Wool, Satin-faced Twill jackets, men's raincoats, too! And just look at these EXTRA features that make Mason jackets so easy to sell:

- Warm, cozy linings of real Sheepskin... nature's own protection against cold!
- Quilted and rayon linings!
- Laskin Lamb waterproof, non-matting fur collars!
- Knitted wristlets!
- Especially-treated leathers that do not scuff or peel!
- Zipper fronts!
- Extra-large pockets!
- Variety of colors for every taste: brown, black, green, grey, tan, blue!

Be the first to sell men who work outdoors this perfect combination!—Non-stuff, warm Horsehide leather jacket lined with wooly Sheepskin—



Even MORE Profits with Special-Feature Shoes

Take orders for Nationally advertised, Velcro-see Air-Cushion Shoes in 150 dress, sport, work styles for men and women. Air-Cushion Innersole gives wonderful feeling of "walking on air." As the Mason man in your town, you feature more shoes in a greater range of sizes and widths than the largest store in town! And at low, direct from factory prices! It's easy to fit customers in the style they want—they keep re-ordering, too—put dollars and dollars into your pocket! Join the exceptional men who make up to \$200 extra a month and get their family's shoes and garments at wholesale prices!

Send for FREE SELLING OUTFIT Today!

Mail coupon today—I'll rush your powerful Free Jacket and Shoe Selling Outfit including 10-second Air-Cushion Demonstrator, and EVERYTHING you need to start building a steady, BIG MONEY, repeat-order business, as thousands of others have done with Mason!

SEND FOR FREE OUTFIT!

Mr. Ned Mason, Dept. M-905
MASON SHOE MFG. COMPANY,
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

You bet I want to start my own extra-income business! Please rush FREE and postpaid my Powerful Selling Outfit—featuring Mason Jackets, Air-Cushion Shoes, other fast-selling specialties—so I can start making BIG MONEY right away!

Name.....

Address.....

Age.....

Town.....State.....

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
DEPT. M-905
CHIPPewa Falls, Wisc.

from the letters, most of you) fascinated from beginning to end.

As I stated on our August issue, the contest will be extended, since no one has "won" yet. Those of you who didn't get around to trying will have more time; those who missed the mark can try again if you wish. But I can't extend it indefinitely, so I'll have to set an arbitrary final date: *contest closes midnight August 31st*—that is, *no entry postmarked later than August 31st, 1952, can be considered.*

One suggestion: read the rules on page 8 of our August issue again, carefully. I said distinctly that, *for the contest*, you must accept all of Phillips' assumptions—that is: what he says took place must be granted; you can't argue that his assumptions don't hold water, because this is an academic puzzle, wherein certain things are "given". Given Phillips' assumptions, on the nature of the problem, what is the flaw in his "solution" of the problem, and what type of error did he make?

It's really very simple, but the first thing you have to do is to spot the "problem".

Letters

ANSWERS FROM EVERYBODY

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

In Rog Phillips' story, "All the Answers," the flaw in its solution lies in the statement that a power-combine would not precipitate a war which it is sure of winning quickly and conclusively, in the realization that complete victory, by removing the enemy, would remove the power-combine's *raison d'être*.

The flaw is that "the enemy" is not a power-combine's actual reason for being, but only the reason offered to the people it controls. Once in complete power, other insincere motivations can be invented to maintain integration.

The kind of error found here is that of ascribing sincere motives to a group that would forcibly impress an ideology on society. Acceptance of Mr. Phillips' solution depends on our readiness to judge others by ourselves.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed the story; it was well-written, thought-provoking, and I'm glad you printed it as-is. I only hope that in your contest you receive lots of correct answers!

Corwin F. Stickney, 480 Broughton Ave.,
Bloomfield, N. J.

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Since writing yesterday, it has occurred to me that my description of the flaw in Phillips' "All the Answers" might be inadequate for the requirements of your contest, in that it refers none too specifically to the terms of the story.

What I should like to add, then, is that only Entor—of the six who comprised the power-combine—was shown as a person really motivated by the ideals of the Council for Freedom. After his attempt, upon realizing the futility of his aims, the other five—although they had gained access to his knowledge—were not dissuaded from their objective. Rial, their new leader, was not shown as having been influenced by the ultimaton, despite Reed's assertion that he was. Rather, the Council's final scene describes its (and Rial's) renewed determination to achieve total power, presumably via an ideological war. These men would see no futility in the accomplishment of their purpose; a war would result, and the ultimaton would not, after all, have changed matters. Mr. Phillips' solution, Therefore, is inconsistent with his characterization of the Council of five. In my opinion, the characterization is logical; the solution is not.

Darn good story, though... I hope this is my last entry!

Corwin F. Stickney

Dear Editor:

In reference to your contest on the story "All the Answers" I would say that it is a good exercise in logical deduction. But, for my money, the flaw arises, first of all, in the Second Brain's reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding the destruction of the First Brain. Using normal philosophical reasoning, similar to that employed by Man to prove his existence, Number Two could surmise the possibility of Number One. But the same basic reasoning could also have been applied by Number One to presume the possibility of yet an-

[Turn To Page 114]

What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which “whispers” to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as funda-

mental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the “Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis,” abbreviated by the initials “AMORC.” The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

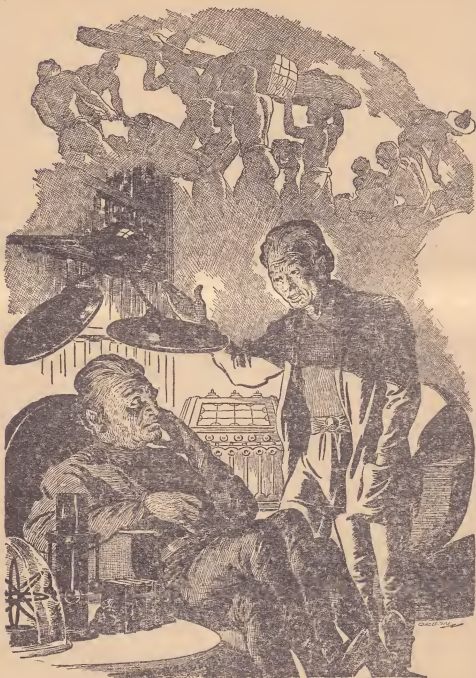
Not For General Distribution

Sincere men and women, in search of the truth—those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for a complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, “The Mastery of Life.” It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe M.A.T.

The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]

San Jose

California



"They're quiet, unassuming, humble little bipeds—willing to do tedious tasks for a mere pittance..." Professor Vjarm said. Dakane listened with growing impatience...

Feature Story
of Worlds to Come

THE TIMELESS ONES

by
Eric
Frank
Russell



PROFESSOR Xtith Vjarm came slowly down the ramp from the giant space-liner. A plastic rain-jacket lay folded over one multi-jointed arm; his other hand held a small case. His big green eyes were surveying the city, taking in every detail, all the way from the spaceport to the far mountains. This was home, all right. Hardly anything had changed since the day he'd left some fourteen years ago; just a couple of new buildings, a dozen new sky-signs, and rather more air-traffic zooming around—otherwise all was pretty much as before.

It was a vast galactic empire, a commonwealth of worlds and races, and it could stand against any enemy. But Vjarm knew one kind of danger against which there was no protection — a conqueror who was in no hurry, who did not have to fight at all in order to win . . .

Home! It was a potent word. When he had gone away, Vjarm had thought with anticipatory pleasure of the city he called home, had looked forward to the thrill of his return, the vision of old, familiar things. But now the magic was gone, evaporated by matters boiling within his mind, pleasure steaming off like superfluous vapor. The city was the same yet not the same. Before his very eyes was one tremendous difference disguised as something too petty to mean anything to anyone but Vjarm, himself.

A dozen Miggies were clustered around the bottom end of the ramp, waiting to carry away the heaviest bags of the overburdened. They had only two legs—whereas the people of this world had four. They had

soft, light skins; the local folk had thick gray hide. They had smoky black eyes that looked impassively into the Professor's green ones as he came nearer, rain-jacket on arm, case in hand.

Vjarm passed them at the same slow pace, his gait four-legged like that of a reluctant horse. None offered to take his case since his bearing made it plain that he intended to carry his own. He passed them in deep, introspective silence, his gaze still on the city, his mind preoccupied. It was almost as if he were completely unaware of their existence.

Their dark orbs shifted from him to the passengers descending behind, seeking those with the air of ones bothered by a ton of luggage. The smallest and skinniest of the Miggies would gladly stagger a mile under an enormous cabin-trunk for a mere one-hundredth of a credit.

A row of copter-cabs were lined up outside the customs-shed; Professor Vjarm signalled one, got in, lay back with jacket tossed on seat and case resting on the front pair of knees. Above his feet-pads, where there was an ankle-like narrowing, the gray hide was wrinkled and seamed: a sure sign that one is not as young as one used to be.

"College of Cosmic History and Archaeology," he told the driver.

The cab hummed and floated up beneath a disk of light. Vjarm stared back at the spaceport, the ramp, the gang of Miggies already at work. Eastward, four monster vessels were making ready for take-off; Westward another was sinking through the clouds and nosing in to land. The average for this port was thirty ships a day. Some had come or were going as much as seventeen hundred light-years which the so-called extra-temporal drive would cut to as many months.

Drifting high across a wide array of towers and spires, the cab made for the city's farther side, dropped

bouncily onto a gravel circle before a long, columnated building of pink granite. Professor Xtith Vjarm got out, paid the driver and watched the machine depart into the sky; then he turned and studied the buildings, trying to drink it in as he'd always imagined he would. The promised shiver of delight failed to appear; he felt too absorbed, serious and businesslike. Grabbing up his case with an eight-fingered hand, he went inside.

MNORTH was still at his huge desk in the bursar's room, same plump pose, same lazy expression, looking as if fourteen long years were no more than a week. He came to his four feet as Vjarm entered, shuffled around the desk and greeted with his usual effusiveness. "Ah, my dear Vjarm, back at last!" He gestured toward a seat. "We expected you half a year ago."

Sitting down, Vjarm sighed deeply. "I stopped off at Baigmsgattle; wanted to go through certain records there."

"What—those old, dusty and faded manuscripts? Surely by that time you'd had more than enough of research?"

"I had good reasons."

"Oh, well, I suppose you know best." Mnorth readjusted his legs for greater comfort, leaned forward with gray-hided arms asprawl on the desk. Without overmuch enthusiasm he asked, "Did you have any real luck on your trip? Did you discover—?"

"The original source of all life?" Vjarm finished for him. "No, I did not; neither did I find the vaguest clue."

"I guessed it from your manner. Had you succeeded where thousands have failed, it would have shown in your features; you would be quite unable to conceal so great a triumph." He relaxed, lay back, eyed the left-hand wall which bore long columns of names from floor to ceiling. "These

they are, the futile seekers of the unfindable."

"They found other things," said Vjarm, in mild reproof. "They piled up information about the universe in such quantity that we've converted an entire satellite into a library big enough to hold it all."

"Data, just data," scoffed Mnorth. "Tactile limitations of marine fauna in the sodium seas of Lantile. How to make and cook a Wulkin pie. Mating techniques of Polimite hard-shelled crawlers. Ninety percent of it is filed away and forgotten.... Knowledge that nobody needs."

"You've been here too long."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"The systematic acquisition of information has become too familiar a process, and you're bored by it."

"Maybe," conceded Mnorth. "Trouble is that the stuff brought in is dreary in the extreme; not a genuinely exciting item anywhere. It's what comes of being born a million years too late."

"Indeed? How is that?"

"Way back in the beginning there was, at least, the thrill of discovery, the strain of battle, the exultation of victory. Now we, and about forty allied life-forms, boss 'an empire that stretches from here to nobody-knows where. Everything is ordered, regulated, conditioned; everything runs like clockwork. Nothing ever happens, because nothing is permitted to happen and because nobody else has enough power to make it happen."

"You're wrong there," said Vjarm, very quietly.

"I'll take you up on that—what's happening that's worth an hour's sleep?"

"We're being conquered."

"Ha-ha!" gave Mnorth, taking hold of his paunch. "We're being conquered—ha-ha-ha!" He rolled a little in his seat, wiped his eyes, enjoyed a final chortle and suggested. "If you've another bottle to spare, I could do with it."

"A bottle of what?"

"The violent brew you've smuggled in from wherever you've been."

Vjarm frowned at him. "I've imported no such stuff; I never touch it. And I'm cold sober."

"Then I must be hearing things. I could have sworn you said something about us being conquered."

"I did."

"How? Where? By whom?"

"At this stage, it might be best to say nothing more," evaded Vjarm. "I must reserve my information for the proper authorities; they might not approve of me first broadcasting it to all and sundry."



"Look," said Mnorth, becoming solemn, "you've been away a long time, travelled long distances—probably had all sorts of strange experiences. You've only just returned, haven't yet oriented yourself afresh, undoubtedly need rest and relaxation. So I would suggest—"

"You are very much mistaken if you think my nerves have cracked under the strain of gadding around the galaxy," Vjarm assured. "I've come back with factual data, not with a bunch of fanciful imaginings. My information can be checked and rechecked a thousand times over. I tell you that we are being mastered, slowly but certainly; it is my duty to inform the authorities."

"Nonsense!" Mnorth dismissed the claim with one sweep of a hand. "If it were true I would know of it."

"Not necessarily."

"I would!" insisted Mnorth; "I'd certainly learn it from many influential friends in high quarters."

"That's why I came to see you first," Vjarm informed.

"Eh?"

"I need an introduction to the Director of Intelligence; it will be impossible to get within ten underlings of him unless I have such an introduction. You can give me one."

"There now!" exclaimed Mnorth, holding his head. "I, too, must be drawn into this imbecility."

"You can be judiciously non-committal. Say only that I am well-known to you personally as an individual of good repute, and not the sort to bother him about nothing; that won't involve you in any way."

"I don't like it. I don't like it one little bit—but I'll do it." Sliding open a drawer, Mnorth took out paper and pen. He wrote laboriously, concentrating on what he wanted to say and selecting suitably innocuous words. Handing it over with poor grace, he commented, "I've been persuaded against my better judgment; the Director won't thank me if you waste his time."

"Do you think the question of our survival is unimportant?"

"Of course not."

He watched Vjarm go out, then took another look at the lists of names upon the wall, wagged his head slowly from side to side. Finally he shrugged and reached for the telephone.

THE YOUNGSTER in the Intelligence Department's anteroom said patiently, and for the fourth time, "I am sorry, Professor, but it can't be done. Your introduction makes not the slightest difference. The Director cannot see anyone—except on specific business that must be stated clearly and unambiguously beforehand."

"Why can't he?"

"He's a very busy person."

"So am I," said Vjarm.

"Then surely you understand that it is quite impossible for him to interview anybody and everybody who chooses to call? He must confine him-

self to the select few whose business is urgent, important, directly concerns his department, and cannot be dealt with satisfactorily by those under him."

"This is urgent, important, and concerns your department."

"It is for us to decide that much," insisted the other, very politely. "Naturally we are unable to reach a decision so long as you refuse us sufficient details to form a basis."

"Can I make an appointment with the Director later on today?" Vjarm inquired.

"I am afraid not. The ruling holds good for all times: no interviews unless the subject thereof is known and approved."

"All right then." Vjarm took a deep breath. "Go ask him whether he's interested in the prospect of us being beaten out of our empire by someone else."

The youngster rocked back, said, "Are you serious?"

"I've never been more so."

"H'm! Please wait a moment." He went away, came back with an older official, introduced him. "This is Fourth Deputy Assistant Director Heigl."

"Now," began Heigl, briskly. "what's all this about a threat to the empire?"

"We're going to be shooed out of it," informed Vjarm.

"I don't think so," Heigl declared, bureaucratically positive. "With all respect to you, Professor, let me assure you that we're considerably better informed than even the most travelled individual can ever hope to be. We have complete and up-to-date details on the warmaking potentialities of every known locality, every known species; there's nothing strong enough to shift us, nothing that dare try with faintest hope of success—unless it be far beyond all limits of exploration." He peered closely at his listener. "I presume that you have not gone *that* far?"

"It is physical impossibility; I cannot live long enough."

"There you are, then." Heigl looked satisfied with himself. "There is no superior power able to reach us across the great gulfs that stretch beyond our frontiers; there is no effective power or combination of powers within our frontiers. Hence, we are menaced by none."

"On the contrary," said Vjarm, firm and stubborn.

Registering faint displeasure, Heigl asked with a touch of sarcasm, "To whom do you attribute the strength to overcome us?"

"I'll tell that to the Director himself."

"Why not tell me?"

"It will be taken no farther; it will be pigeonholed and forgotten. Somebody may dig it out and look at it when it's thousands of years too late."

"We're not in the habit of ignoring matters of *genuine* moment," said Heigl, openly miffed.

"It being you who decide whether or not said matter *is* of moment" retorted Vjarm. His features assumed the expression of one prepared to wait to doomsday. "If I cannot see the Director, I must see someone high enough to ensure that the matter is not dropped, and to bring about whatever action may be necessary."

Casting a resigned glance at his confrere, Heigl grumbled, "We'll see who is available."

THE TWO departed, exchanging looks that told what they thought of the professorial crackpot in the anteroom. Vjarm sat and waited; time went by. He guessed their purpose: it was to make him lose patience and go away. Well, he wouldn't; he was prepared to remain until the last sun died out and the whole cosmos went dark. He was like that on occasion.

Eventually, another individual came to see him, a heavily-built blocky specimen with hard, unblinking eyes. "Sorry to have kept you,

Professor. The delay was unavoidable." He took a seat that creaked under him. "I am Second Assistant Director Jursin."

"That's nice," offered Vjarm; "one can get partway if one persists."

Jursin countered it with, "And I'm about as high as you'll get unless you can put a real scare into me. Let me warn you that I don't scare easily."

"The subject is more for serious worry than extreme fright. I—"

Halting him with a gesture Jursin informed, "I can't spare you much time. I've already heard from others as much—or as little—as you've been willing to say. We want to know only one thing: *who* is menacing the empire and looks like taking it from us? Upon the answer to that depends how far we'll take it." He leaned forward expectantly, "Who?"

Vjarm told him.

Standing up, Jursin said with finality, "Thank you very much for coming to warn us. Good-day, Professor."

Also arising, Vjarm complained, "You don't believe me."

Deciding that a little bluntness was required, Jursin told him, "It is too silly for words."

"You really think that?"

"I don't think it—I *know* it! This is the Intelligence Department, and we have voluminous data to go upon; that's our business."

"I've a wad of data, too. Translating it is *my* business."

"Then I suggest you go tend to it and leave us to ours." Jursin went to the door through which he had entered, turned, force a cracked smile. "No hard feelings, Professor; it's just that we're understaffed, overworked and much too busy to admire the bees in other people's bonnets." He went away.

MNORTH plucked a flat lip and said, "I'm not a bit surprised."

"Why not?" asked Vjarm.

"The Intelligence Department is afflicted with a visiting loony every week."

"Thank you!"

"You asked for it. Consider the position: we rule a cosmic empire so old that there are doubts about its precise age, so huge that none can measure its precise extent. The last survey took five centuries, listed 7,837 populated solar systems and by the time they'd finished the figure was already out of date. Our particular species lords it over the lot. True, we are helped by forty allied life-forms but they are subservient to us. If the whole forty combined against us it would be suicide for them; we can out-run, out-gun, out-bomb the lot."



"And gain swift victory?"

"Yes!"

"What if someone else is working for *slow* victory?"

"I don't understand."

"Of course you don't; neither does anyone else. That's why I think we may be doomed. We're obsessed by a time-sense that creates a certain urgency in everything we do. We are so conditioned by it, we tend to think that anything not achieved quickly will never be achieved at all. And we're wrong—hopelessly, dreadfully wrong!"

"Really?" Mnorth grinned and nodded toward the window beyond which soared the host of spires and towers. "We're not doing so badly in our erroneous way."

"That's *now*. Very soon, now will be yesterday."

"It was the same yesterday, will be the same tomorrow."

"That depends on what you mean

by tomorrow," declared Vjarm, with great certitude. He studied Mnorth a moment before he went on, "Can you suggest any other and better way of reaching the Director in person? If not, can you think of anyone else with sufficient authority to compel action?"

"I can't give you any more help," said Mnorth, weary of the subject, "except by strongly advising you to forget the whole thing and enjoy the quiet rest for which obviously you're long overdue."

Suppressing an impulse to produce a biting retort, Vjarm said, "I think I'll take a stroll round town—see the sights and so forth; no use coming home without taking a look at it."

"You do that," Mnorth approved, with disguised relief. "Take one of those newfangled warm-oil baths for the good of your hide. Go to a couple of shows; get drunk; sleep the night in a cell. It brightens the ego to let it go on the spree."

"Perhaps—and perhaps not."

Professor Vjarm went out, ignored the public transport system, the moving road-strips, the copter cabs, and contented himself with tramping through the streets while he thought things over. So deep was his absorption that he noted little of his surroundings and was satisfied to go wherever his feet carried him.

A SHORT time ago he'd come off that spaceship with things on his mind that had been stewed for months during the homeward trip. He had stepped off the ramp, ready-primed and word-perfect with a message that should sound an alarm throughout a world, a system, an empire. But now, back in the old, half-forgotten environment, he realized it wasn't going to be so easy; in his concentration upon the threat to his own kind, he had overlooked certain psychological factors inherent to the present set-up.

For instance: the empire was run by forty-odd different life-forms with

one of them—his own—militarily dominant. That arrangement meant a certain amount of co-operation, of give-and-take, of tolerance. In order to enjoy the convenience of useful allies one must endure them; and that meant, in turn, that no one shape or form could level accusations against another shape or form without being counter-accused of shape-prejudice. The emotional and the feeble-minded, of which there were plenty, tended to dismiss without a moment's consideration the question of whether or not the charges were well-founded, and proceed to pillow the accuser as one maliciously engaged in spreading shape-hatred.

To make matters worse, so many varied life-forms were so deeply conscious of their own individual structure that a verbal attack upon one would be construed as a sly attack upon all. There had been rare spasms of shape prejudice in the dim and distant past; several life-forms had experienced an unpleasant taste of it and had not forgotten. No one form had had the monopoly of misery in this respect—therefore, all were touchy about it. He had only to name the enemy to give the enemy a host of sympathizers.

On top of this, Vjarm was up against the general insistence upon thinking along familiar lines. The moderns were just as modernly orthodox as the ancients had been anciently orthodox; their reasoning was equally dogmatic. It was going to be exceedingly difficult to make them see that battles do *not* have to be fought with weapons or even with ideas, and that total conquest does *not* have to be the successful termination of a political, economic or military operation.

There are ways of gaining one's ends that are incredibly subtle; the natural techniques of minds that have infinite patience because they are utterly timeless. Minds that know intuitively, rather than deliberately,

that gentle, long-sustained pressure can break down a wall as thoroughly as a blast of explosive. One merely has to wait longer; one can well afford to wait, because time is nothing but a vain concept that impels others to hurry to the grave.

The timeless ones could, and did, lounge against a wall that someday would collapse, and with completely unfathomable gaze watch some other -form run morning after morning for the same public vehicle that never got him anywhere—because tomorrow he was running for it again. Until a day came when finally he did not run, but was carried. And the timeless ones would still be there, watching, waiting, biding through half eternity.

VJARM CAME back to awareness of his surroundings and realised that he was scowling. He composed his face and looked around; his legs had taken him into the Blindith quarter, the haunt of a life-form from a system sixty light-years away. They were slinky, snakish creatures with gabbly mouths and a wondrous flair for top-grade cooking. Many of them had high-salaried jobs in the kitchens of hotels and the galleys of space-ships.

If he'd wanted to eat he couldn't have picked anywhere better, and his insides promptly said that he did so want. A couple of hundred yards farther on he entered a flashy restaurant, took a seat at an unoccupied table, picked up a menu the size of a book; only the Blindiths could simultaneously satisfy the gastronomical quirks of half a hundred kinds of bellies.

Just one of them was in evidence, his thin, sinuous body swaying over the cash-desk while he raked in the credits. All the others would be in the kitchen, juggling with pots, pans and strange culinary devices. The waiters were Konnus—a slick-footed, dexterous-tentacled form of life pos-

sessed of extraordinary linguistic abilities. It was said that some Konnus could converse fluently in seventy vocal languages, and a dozen gesticulatory ones.

Vjarm ate slowly, studying the customers and the staff, his mind full of thoughts. There were some twenty life-forms present, his own kind predominating. Zists and Wengels and prong-eyed Forbs from the Blue Star. Drooling Sheems, always ready to guzzle. Hard-shelled Samasams from a binary, gloomy and cold under a single sun.

From where he sat, he could see into the big kitchen whence came a never-ending clatter and an incredible assortment of savory odors. There was a continual procession of burdened Konnus through the doors. Within, white-garmented Blindiths bustled to and fro, stirring, mixing, tasting. To one side a quartet of flat-faced, impassive Miggies were washing and drying an immense pile of dishes and utensils. That was all they asked of the Miggies: to wash and dry a mountain that never went down, and they did it like automatons.

A furry Vashuri slithered in, crawled onto the seat opposite Vjarm, raked the menu for his favorite fried sea-lice. Vjarm's gaze passed disinterestedly over him, took in the crowd and the kitchen a second time, swung round, looked straight into the expressionless eyes of a timeless one.

Pushing away his plate, he paid and went out.

DURING the next ten days, Vjarm paid two more calls on the Intelligence Department and was given the suave heave-ho. A personal and confidential note to the Director brought an immediate reply consisting of nine words. "We acknowledge receipt of your communication of yesterday's date."

A note to the War Department was ignored; four telephone calls were rewarded with the quadruple brush-off. A written appeal to the Imperial Coordinator was answered by a sharp re-

buke from a junior clerk. Vjarm knew what he knew—but everyone else knew better.

On the morning of the eleventh day, Mnorth rang through and said, "Professor Dakane would like to see you as soon as may be convenient."

He went at once. Dakane was head of the college and not the sort of person to let go hang. The oldster was in the bursar's room chatting to Mnorth. He glanced up as Vjarm came in. "It's about your lectures," he explained; "the first of them is due tomorrow. I trust you will have some worthwhile things to tell us concerning your long investigations."

"I shall," promised Vjarm, with emphasis. He was conscious of Mnorth watching him.

"We'll have to fix dates for the full series," Dakane went on. "How many lectures do you propose to give us?"

"One."

"One?" Dakane made no effort to conceal his surprise. "Feidel gave eighteen, and then had not fully covered his subjects; Gnorst gave twenty-two. Do you think that one is adequate to cover your fourteen years' absence?"

"No," admitted Vjarm; "but it will be sufficient to deal with the only part of real importance. The lesser aspects can be elucidated later, and used to fill in vacant lecture periods."

"Oh, well," grumbled Dakane, not liking it but refraining from saying so, "I can't quibble so long as you've got the first one fixed up. I'll have to announce the subject on the bulletin-board." He helped himself to paper from Mnorth's desk, made ready to scribble a note. "What is its title?"

"The Timeless Technique of Species Domination."

"Domination?" Dakane stared at him. "That's an unfortunate word; you'll have a mixed audience containing about two dozen life-forms. They'll be rather sensitive to any talk about mastery."

"I know; That's what I don't like about the matter."

DAKANE pushed away the paper. "We're the bosses, and everyone knows it; there is need to remind them of it only on rare occasion. To some extent, our superiority as a species is maintained by the simple method of not mentioning it too often, not flaunting it in the faces of our allies. We are diplomatic; we do everything possible to give them the feeling of equals and—so long as no one of us is indiscreet—the task is easy because every life-form swiftly accommodates itself to what it *wants* to feel. Therefore, it would be considerably to the discredit of this college if some irresponsible speech stirred up—"

"Science is concerned with truth, not with sentiment," put in Vjarm.

"There are truths that don't *have* to be emphasised," Dakane retorted. "Especially when such emphasis serves no useful purpose."

"Surely it is useful to draw attention to the urgent need of devising a means to ensure our own survival?"

"Our survival," echoed Dakane, blinking a couple of times and looking as if he had not heard aright. "Are you trying to tell me that the domination on which you wish to speak is not ours but someone else's?"

"Yes."

Dakane caught a significant look thrown to him by Mnorth, took a deep breath and said, "I see your purpose; it is to put over in the guise of a scientific lecture—this matter about which you have been pestering the authorities."

"True," admitted Vjarm, quite unperturbed. "But remember this: if what I intend to say is just plain silly, I shall make myself a ridiculous figure; my reputation and my career will be ruined. On the other hand, if it is *not* silly, it will be well worth saying—and well worth hearing."

Pondering the point, Dakane came to a decision. "Only once during my seventy years in this college have I had to exercise censorship over an intended lecture. That was long ago, when I discovered in the nick of time that a speech on the phototropic reac-

tions of the nocturnal Goshans of Betelgeuse would be regarded by them as the lowest form of pornography; so we had to cancel it." He heaved a deep sigh. "Now, it seems, the time has come again."

"Meaning that you wish to see my script?" inquired Vjarm.

"Yes; I must examine it most carefully."

"There is no script. I prepared my lecture and learned it by heart while on the spaceship."

"In that case," Dakane grumbled, "you'll have to recite it for me and condense it as much as possible." He eyed Mnorth speculatively, added, "And in private." Getting up, he went to the door, gestured to Vjarm, "Come to my room."



COMPOSING himself in a deep seat, Dakane glanced over his study, said with a faint touch of irritation, "Before you commence, let me advise you not to hop erratically from one part to another. Start at the beginning, take it through to the ending and make it as brief as possible."

"If I start at the beginning I'll have to repeat items you've known for years."

"Never mind; I want the complete picture."

"All right," Vjarm settled himself. "Many millenia ago, we evolved the theory that all life was brought to the various planets by spores floating through space. It was a poor theory; it contributed nothing toward solving the mystery of life's origin. It did no more than change the locale, leaving us with the question: from where did the spores come?"

"We haven't the vaguest notion even today," Dakane remarked, as if he seriously doubted that they ever would know.

"Our space-roaming eventually caused development of a subsidiary theory," Vjarm went on; "we discovered that if we drew lines on the star-maps running from the locations of the oldest life-forms to the locations of the youngest, they described spirals irresistibly suggestive of long-term rotation and some turbulence. That gave birth to the idea that, in the beginning of 'time', the life-spores had been generated upon and ultimately scattered by some uniquely-conditioned planet or planetary system centrally placed within the galaxy. But because of galactic rotation, turbulence and expansion, this source is now far off-center—if it ever did exist and still exists."

"Which it mightn't," commented Dakane, pessimistically.



Vjarm did not argue the point. He continued, "So, for numberless centuries, we and two other colleges have sent into the cosmos a quota of investigators qualified to trace life-origins back toward their theoretical common source. The job is far too big for a hundred generations of us, too big for a thousand. Therefore each investigator can do no more than carry it as far as he can get, trusting to his appointed successor to take up where he left off."

"If I remember aright," said Dakane, narrowing his eyes in thought, "you were assigned to the line dropped by the late Professor Roganst."

"I was. Roganst finished on XC7271, the large planetary system of a medium blue-white star; his notes showed that the next logical step was to try pick up the line on XBL 638, the system of an orange dwarf. So I went there." He hesitated, eyeing the other. "I stayed there. I go no farther."

"Why not?"

"I dived deep into my research, and discovered something for which I was not looking; if one digs for tantalum and instead finds sapphires, what does one do?"

"Digs on, I suppose," said Dakane.

"Dismissing the original purpose from one's mind?"

"Well, temporarily perhaps," Dakane conceded, feeling that he was being cunningly drawn into finding excuses for Vjarm's sins of omission.

"The system of XBL 638 is wholly occupied by Miggies," Vjarm informed. "It didn't surprise me, as I'd already ascertained the fact; the cosmic encyclopedia on the ship listed it as one of the many Miggie-populated systems. What did surprise me beyond all measure was when I found, after long and tedious investigation, that this system had not always been the Miggies' very own; once upon a time there had been others."

"Of different shape?"

"No. These others were structurally the same; they differed in many superficial respects. I now believe—although I cannot prove it—that they differed mentally in one highly-important way." He gazed abstractedly at one of his hands, bending and unbending the eight fingers while his thoughts sorted themselves out. "I'll come to that part later."

"Take it in its proper turn," Dakane approved; "I dislike intellectual untidiness."

"Naturally, I looked into the history of these vanished unknowns, or as much of it as is still recorded. The further back I went, the more incredible the data I dug up." Vjarm leaned forward. "I discovered that the entire bunch of them, Miggies and non-Miggies alike had spread out from the third planet—and it was not the Miggies who organized the spreading; it was the others!"

"You mean the others first conquered space?"

"They did."

BROODING a little while, Vjarm continued, "I had great difficulty in extracting the facts; many valuable records have been long destroyed, either deliberately or accidentally. Others were legendary in nature, and therefore represented original truths considerably distorted by the passage of time and the overactive imaginations of various writers. But when the same thing is said, indicated, implied, or hinted at, again and again, more than a hundred times, the basic fact can be deduced. And it is a basic fact that, once upon a time—I cannot ascertain precisely when—these vanished peoples were numerically greater than and technically superior to the Miggies." He stared hard at Dakane as if to drive home the following remark. "Nevertheless, they have gone; the Miggies remain."

Now finding himself interested, Dakane asked, "Did you discover the reason?"

"I did; it was the simplest and yet the most effective technique of which I've ever heard." He paused, then informed, "The Miggies *bred* them clean out of existence."

"You are certain of that?"

"Never more certain! These others made great discoveries, wonderful inventions, built themselves a high standard of life. The Miggies remained content merely to breed. The others waged and won big wars, drove their sciences to considerable heights, conquered space and gained the neighboring planets. The Miggies went on breeding; that was all they asked of life—the right to be fruitful and multiply. Nothing more."

"And then?" Dakane stirred uneasily.

"Came a time when the others took alarm," said Vjarm. "They combined against the common peril. There was war; there was terrible slaughter. From a short-term, and purely military point of view, they were winning all along the line; in the longer view they were not winning. They'd left it too late. Miggies were now multiply-

ing faster than they could be killed. The useless battle went on—for months, for years—until eventually these others collapsed from sheer exhaustion."

"Whereupon the Miggies slaughtered the lot?" Dakane suggested.

"No, they did not," Vjarm contradicted sharply. "They dropped their arms the moment fighting ceased. They did what they have always done, even with those who had conquered them several times in the past. They bred with the others—not by force, not coercively, but amicably, in the manner of letting Nature take its course. Slowly, but surely, they absorbed them; in ten or twenty generations there were none left but Miggies." He mused gloomily, added, "An ancient non-Miggie scribe expressed their methods very succinctly without knowing where it was going to end. He said that for ten thousand years the Miggies had lost every battle in the field—and then won it in the bedroom."

"They cannot adopt such tactics with *us*," declared Dakane, with much certainty. "Different shapes cannot mate and produce offspring."

"They cannot breed *with* us but they can breed *against* us," Vjarm retorted; "history says so!"

"Does it? In what way?"

"The third planet became wholly Miggie. Using the facilities created by those they'd absorbed, they spread to the other planets. When our empire first made contact we found a Miggie-populated system. It wasn't long before they started emigrating in *our* vessels. They went out in little groups—ones, twos or odd dozens—quiet, unassuming, humble little bipeds willing to do tedious tasks in return for a mere pittance—and the right to breed. Naturally, they were given the tasks and the pittances. In sixteen thousand years they had made the Mordarians of Centauri wholly dependent upon them, lazy, indolent and almost sterile—and then they bred them right out of room in the system."

DAKANE sat up. "Huh? Mordarians— I don't recall them."

"No wonder," said Vjarm, drily; "they've been gone an awful long time. You'll find them mentioned in our records, though; the dusty, almost forgotten ones filed on Baigmsgattle. The *present* records are more significant, especially the details given by the last survey. Know what they say?"

"I've read them," admitted Dakane. "To which item do you refer?"

"That there are now one hundred seventy-seven Miggie-populated systems." He watched the other for visible effect, and commented, "That's where you get when time doesn't exist and you're using the mightiest weapon known to sentient beings—namely, the weapon of the fertile womb."

Dakane thought it over, frowning to himself now and again, then asked, "Do you consider it to be their deliberate policy to indulge an insidious form of conquest spread endlessly through time?"

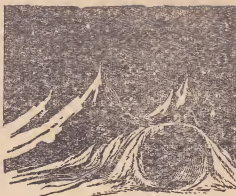
"The deliberateness of it is something I've been quite unable to decide. I'm sceptical about it being consciously purposeful; more likely it's instinctive."

"Why do you say that?"

"The Miggies seem to be unaware of it themselves. I've a wild notion that they're motivated by two minds instead of the usual one mind. I've a private theory that their individual minds are subordinate to a common mind which is playing a deep, dark game so enormously drawn-out that our own time-conditioned minds can't see it."

"You profess to see it."

"Only because it's been held under my nose." Vjarm shifted around restlessly in his seat. "When I went away fourteen years ago, no Miggies had got as far as this system of ours; there were none on this planet, not one. I knew of them only by hearsay. When I returned, the first thing I saw was a dozen of them. I have seen more since. Maybe there are a hun-



dred now upon this world. Someday it will be a hundred millions!"

"When?" Dakane leaned forward, eyeing him keenly. "I am asking you *when*? I know you're a historian rather than a mathematician. All the same, you're quite capable of doing sums in progressive arithmetic. You have, or ought to have, a shrewd idea of their rate of spread and therefore should be capable of estimating how long it will take them to squeeze us out of this system. *When* will it be?"

With obvious reluctance, Vjarm said, "The event may be delayed or accelerated by unforeseeable factors, but I reckon the minimum time will be about twelve thousand years."

"There now!" Dakane smacked a hand on his desk. "I hope to live another hundred years; my children may last a further one-fifty, their children another one-fifty. In five hundred years' time, my grandchildren will be dust. In a thousand years you and I and everyone now in existence will be utterly forgotten, and there will be no living creature identifiable as the line of anyone living today. Do you honestly expect a single person to feel concern about what may or may not happen twelve thousands years hence? Don't you think we've troubles enough in our own lifetimes?"

"Probably that's how the Mordarians argued. Where are they now?"

"Somehow, the galaxy manages to get along without them," Dakane pointed out with a trace of sarcasm. He stood up, his expression set, deter-

mined. "I cannot permit the college forum to be used for the purpose of inciting shape-hatred; therefore I cannot allow you to make this lecture. As soon as possible you will prepare another on an innocuous subject of greater scientific interest and submit the script for my approval."

VJARM also arose, his face taut. "You realize that the Miggies' methods succeed mostly because everyone leaves posterity to look after its own problems?"

"Quite properly, too," declared Dakane. "Did our ancestors care a hoot about *our* problems when we were their posterity?" He waved a contemptuous hand as Vjarm was about to make reply. "Kindly refrain from arguing with me. I tell you again that no matter how powerful may be your obsession about events in the extremely far future, it is highly desirable that you should not give it voice.

"Either you will be laughed at or treated seriously. In the former case you will bring this college into contempt along with yourself. In the latter you will find that for every life-form willing to join your anti-Miggie crusade there will be two others who will join the opposite side solely because they'd suspect that they are next on our list—and the empire would be split from end to end by a war of shape-rivalry unparalleled in history."

"But—"

"I have forbidden the lecture and that is final!" Dakane pointed to the door. "Dismiss the subject from your mind, and submit an alternative without delay."

Vjarm went slowly out. He was not riled, not really bitter. These difficulties had been feared during his journey home, and he was lost for an effective way to counter them. His chief feeling was that of utter futility. No immovable object was going to be placed in the path of the irresistible force he had discovered. The excuse was a good one: the force was not due to make itself felt for a dozen millenia.

Maybe he *had* been bothering himself unduly about matters that were properly the concern of generations yet unborn. As Dakane had remarked, generations long gone by hadn't shown much interest in their descendants of the present time. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

And yet...

One hundred seventy-seven solar systems!

His feet were pounding the sidewalk vents above the subway, the noise sounding hollowly: *doom, doom, doom.*

He wandered downtown, stewing it over and over, moving without seeing as he'd done once before. In a million years' time, how many shapes would remain within the galaxy?

One? Only one?

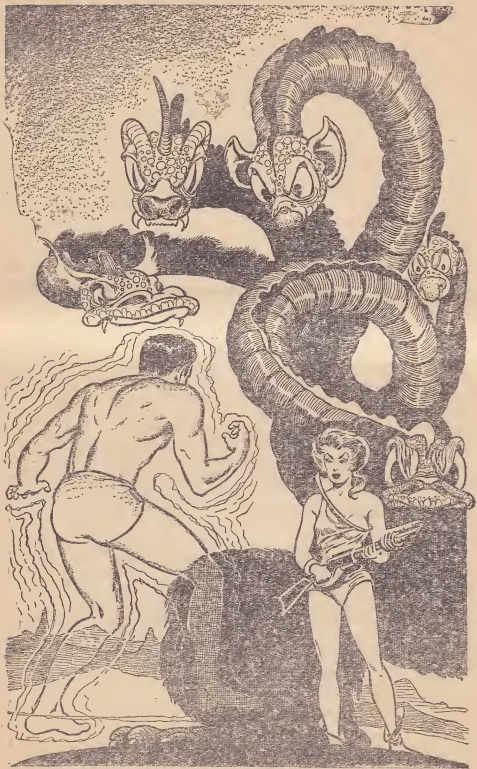
Oh, well, by then he'd be gone from the scheme of things far too long to care. The surroundings registered as he reached this conclusion. His legs had borne him into the slummy quarter scheduled for ultimate levelling and rebuilding. Here a multitude of less-skilled and poorly paid life-forms clustered cheek by jowl, unable to afford the seclusion of their colonies in other quarters.

He found himself standing on a corner facing a small, dilapidated shop that once had been the haunt of a tendrilled Jallanite who repaired the hundred and one types of galactic time-recorders. Perhaps the former owner was dead; at any rate, the shop had changed hands.

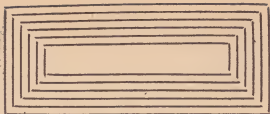
Its window's bottom half was now obscured by drap paint. Its top half bore lettering in characters that were inobtrusive, meek, almost apologetic. *Hand Laundry.*

Walking past, Vjarm saw the Miggie proprietor lounging in the doorway, saw the light countenance and black eyes as he went by, the timeless one smiled at him with a smile that was childlike and bland.

Vjarm smiled back, politely, plausibly—and with a coldness down his spine.

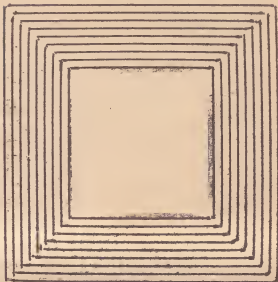


● Wherever this was, Reeder knew he shouldn't be here! ●



THE CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

Reeder knew he was far from first-class material for this job; they sent him to investigate conditions on Lagnoupe I because no one considered the situation important enough to send out anyone better. But Reeder found interference here, flagrant violation of Terrestrial laws, and knew he'd have to do an expert's job . . .



A MATTER-TRANSMITTER is essentially a simple gadget. The theory behind it is complex, of course, but the machine itself is not as complicated as it looks. Most of the items that impress the unenlightened onlooker are actually parts of the computer which align the trans-

Novelet by Larry Shaw

mitter precisely with any one of the thousands of receptors scattered through space, or are safety-devices designed to prevent any conceivable accident.

It can be asserted that accidents are impossible in such travel; even the possibility of human error has been cancelled out, and no "jumper" need feel the slightest fear. Though John Reeder had made only a few

jumps, he knew that he was perfectly safe, and could devote his thoughts entirely to future problems.

Thus, when the accident happened, it disconcerted him completely.

The trip began all right. The platform had its usual distinctive, resilient feel under Reeder's bare feet; the hum of remote but tremendous power climbed its familiar scale. The dials and tubes ranked outside the glass dome glowed cheerfully, like old friends, and the scene beyond the platform edge began to flicker and spin in the expected way.

Then it happened.

The power-hum rose to a scream. Within split seconds, the sound became ear-splitting, then head-splitting. Reeder shrieked and couldn't hear himself, then pounded his temples desperately as a dozen white-hot diamond drills began to drive into his skull.

Even through his agony, he realized dimly that something was radically wrong. Seconds had passed—they'd seemed like years, but they had at least been seconds. Reeder had not reached the receptor, and matter-transmission came close enough to being instantaneous so that the jumper couldn't tell the difference.

The whine died to a muted, steady whistle, annoying but bearable. The pain stopped. Reeder opened his eyes to study eddying mists that surrounded him, wondering what they were, where he was, and how much chance he had of getting to his destination, or back home—or anywhere else—alive.

The mists were smoky grey, and Reeder seemed to be floating in them, with no solid footing of any kind. Cautiously, he made swimming motions; it was both a relief and a puzzle to find that, if his senses weren't lying, he still had full control of his body.

The mists began to take on pastel colors, which appeared and disappeared hesitantly, blending, with no reference to any normal spectrum.

They became brighter, deeper, and more sharply-defined; they assumed meaningless shapes, which flashed and darted about Reeder in heatless kaleidoscopic explosions.

He watched helplessly. His brain was clear, but there was no evidence with which to work. He couldn't even speculate on his mission, and whether it had any connection with the immediate problem. At home, on Earth, he'd been an eminently-respectable citizen, living a conventional and routine life; he'd never been drafted before, and had never really expected to be.

He had known it *could* happen, of course. Reeder was proud to be an Earthman, proud to have been born and brought up in the cradle and center of galactic civilization. He had traced his ancestry for centuries to acquire an official rating of AAA-1—as pure as you could get. He could recite the Basic Law by heart, though most people began to forget some of its details as soon as they left their job-training centers. He was happy simply to be a useful member of society, but he'd always thought he could be most useful in his post—fairly high up but essentially humdrum—with the Psychoscanning Office. He was not the adventurous, secret agent type, definitely not.

But the summons had come, and he had answered. His was not to reason why, his was but...

This wouldn't do! He was in this thing now, and he would fight on as bravely as any of his pioneer ancestors. From the looks of things, he couldn't expect outside aid—his brain was his only tool or weapon. But he was very proud of his brain. Don't retreat from the problem, Reeder; face it and solve it! Think!

THE IDEA that something had gone wrong with the transmitter was illogical, but seemed to be the only possibility. If so, he had probably been injured. (*Not dead, no, not dead...*)

He felt no pain, true; but the injury could have been so complete as almost to destroy his body (*not dead!*), so that even 22nd century science would need time in which to repair it. So... perhaps he was drugged, his mind preserved by injections, electricity, and a bath of salubrious fluids—and the body he seemed to have a delusion from the subcellars of that free-floating mind.

What, he wondered, does a brain in solitary confinement think about, to keep from going crazy?

The bursting colors were still there, but now they moved more slowly and steadily, in regular patterns. They emerged from a definite center, directly in front of Reeder but at a distance impossible to judge. They flowed toward him, around and beyond him, in smooth waves. Expectantly, Reeder watched the point from which they came.

The point became a disk of golden light, which widened slowly as the colors surrounding it darkened to a solid black background.

The disk shattered and rained away in silent golden teardrops—and Reeder threw up his arms in an involuntary spasm of fright.

A monster floated in space before him, a monster whose form changed as unceasingly as the colors had, but remained horrible through each variation. It had—Reeder shuddered as he forced himself to look—a large number of heads, but the exact number could not be counted; they seemed to keep appearing and disappearing, weaving in and out between and around others on sinuous, scaly necks. Each head was different; each ghastly.

The body itself boiled and surged like a cooking custard; obscene appendages sprouted, grew, gestured grotesquely—and vanished.

And the entire conglomeration was charging down upon Reeder at a terrific speed, bellowing, screaming,

steaming, snorting, thumping and roaring as it came.

Even in his panic, Reeder wondered about the thumping, until he saw that a shining silver ribbon of roadway had materialized under him and the monster. It was supported on nothingness and wound off into the distance until, immeasurably far off, it reached a delicate, jewel-like city.

Then, with a final ear-piercing screech, the monster was upon him.... Upon him almost literally, and towering above him, although not actually touching him. The thing had come to a shuddering stop, its myriad claws making long scratches in the roadway and raising fountains of sparkling dust. Reeder could feel its hot, stinking breath surrounding him. It hulked there, panting, while something slid down a hairy leg from high above.

THE SOMETHING turned out to be a girl, with long, flowing red hair and a figure highlighted by a scanty costume of shimmering silk. Reeder waited, ready to fight or flee, as she came forward; she carried something that looked like a weapon.

And even while part of Reeder's mind got ready for a blaze of physical action, another corner of it clicked along briskly, trying to separate illusion from reality, sanity from madness. Psychoscanning required a good brain; highly objective and carefully trained; Reeder had it.

That mental corner held on even as the redhead raised her weapon and shifted slightly. It continued to seek for a logical answer as he saw her face harden suddenly, her finger begin to tighten on the trigger—even as he swung his somewhat scrawny arms and hurled himself forward in a diving tackle.

It lost its clarity as Reeder hurtled headlong into a wall of glass and stopped with a thump that sent the universe twirling dizzily around him.

He sat up with an aching head. He

was surrounded by a glass dome, and the surface on which he sat was silkily resilient. There was a friendly hum of power and a glow of many tubes; mental clarity began to crawl back.

Reeder had finally completed his interrupted journey; at least, he was in a receptor. Whether it was the *right* one was an open question—all transmitters and receptors necessarily looked just about alike. And he might, for all he knew, have done an about-face in mid-jump and arrived back on Earth. Such a thing was unheard of—but so was this whole experience.

He stood up, trying to ignore his throbbing head, pushed his thin hair back and wiped his watery eyes. Outside the bell-jar-like structure, a man stopped punching buttons on the control board and turned to face him.



Reeder studied the man as he stepped through the doorway, which slid open in the dome and down off the platform. His hair was white, long and unkempt; his eyes were deep and sunken, glowing like distant danger signals. His hands and his almost lipless mouth worked spasmodically. In all, he was a fantastic picture of age and decrepitude, and Reeder wondered how he could hold the gatekeeper's job—transmitters were important, even on a seldom-visited planet like this. If this *was* Lagnoupe I, at least.

"Your name?" he demanded belligerently, seizing the advantage without wasting any time.

THE OLD man stared at him piercingly, pressed his hands to his sides, and worked his mouth. It took Reeder several seconds to realize he was registering amusement. The tall

young draftee frowned blackly, and decided that when his mission was finished, he'd see about getting this obvious incompetent replaced. He was already despairing of getting an even partial answer to his personal problem out of the decrepit wreck.

"Glad to see you, y'r honor," the old man cackled finally. "Don't get many folks comin' through here at all—especially not folks direct from Earth. Natural, this world being the oppressed, regimented, cussedly dull place it is—but the same thing makes me wish decent company would come, more often. Care for a drink?"

"I asked your name!" Reeder said icily.

"Oh... Sorry, sorry," the oldster mumbled. "Forget my manners, yes I really do, bein' all alone so much. Can't really blame me, stuck in a hole like this. Ain't got no use for manners a-tall up here. How about that drink, son?"

Reeder held his patience in check with a supreme effort. "I might join you in a drink while you give me some information," he said finally. "But first what is your name?" He couldn't help accenting the last word angrily.

The old man gave a gurgling chuckle. "Sorry, sorry," he repeated. "I'm Obadiah Lang, but my friends call me Obad—or just plain Bad. Heh heh! Please ta meetcha, y'r honor. Drink?"

"Thank you," John Reeder said. He introduced himself, added: "But you were supposed to be expecting me, of course. I presume you *did* receive the 'stat transmittal of my credentials from Earth. You understand this is a highly confidential investigation of conditions here on Lagnoupe I, and that I may be forced to call on you for extraordinary assistance at any time? I must insist on your complete cooperation, you know."

Inwardly, he hoped he wouldn't have to depend on this old fool for anything important. Not that he felt worried at the moment—he was beginning

to fit into his role rather well. He'd undoubtedly wind this business up in short order. Then he could get back to his regular post, and a sane and comfortable existence. Hmm, his regular post? A promotion, perhaps...

Pondering, Reeder followed Lang into another room—considerably smaller than the one they had left, and comfortably furnished. This was a trifle surprising in itself; Reeder wondered if it was in violation of the rules governing Earth's ambassadors. This "embassy" on Lagnoupe I could not be very big, or appear really important to the planet's inhabitants—hence it shouldn't throw money around lavishly. Above all, Earth did not want it known how advanced its civilization was, or what power it could wield.

Reeder had had a generalized briefing on Lagnoupe I before leaving Earth, and he knew it as a backward planet; it had only recently reached the level of primitive space-travel, via rockets, and had not as yet gotten out of the Lagnoupe system. It was unlikely, considering this, that they wasted any thought on a system as far away as Sol, or would bother trying to figure out a science so far advanced over their own.

Apparently—Reeder grinned slightly to himself—they didn't even pay any attention to old Lang, who was ostensibly Earth's friendly ambassador and general representative. Since there could be no commerce between the two planets, no interchange of ideas of any sort, there simply couldn't be much for old Obad to do here. He watched the transmitter "gate" that the inhabitants knew nothing about, of course, and passed on what few messages Earth might send to the Lagnoupe I government. That would be sufficient excuse for his presence, in the eyes of the local government; and there'd be no reason for the average citizens to notice him at all, except as an amusing freak.

When Reeder had received his

draft call, he had wondered—not *too* openly, of course—why the gate-keeper on Lagnoupe I hadn't been able to handle whatever problem had arisen. Seeing Lang, he wondered no longer. On the other hand, the Earth government hadn't thought the task important enough to send one of their hot-shot agents, and had chosen Reeder from the regular service draft. Which only made him all the more determined to do a job that couldn't possibly be criticized.



LANG WAVED Reeder to a pneumatic rester, poured him a drink, sat down himself. Reeder refused to be lulled and sat bolt upright, though the softness of the rester kept threatening his position.

"First of all," he snapped, "do you know anything about what happened to me in transmission?"

Lang somehow looked wise and quizzical at the same time. "Sure," he said throatily. "You were transmitted. What else?"

Irritation made Reeder lose some of his carefully established control. "What else! That monster, those mists, the pain, the time it took, that girl... What else!"

Lang reacted in the most annoying possible way. He looked judicious, smiled slightly, and shook his head slowly from side to side. He didn't have to say anything; his attitude made his suspicions plain.

Reeder pulled himself together. As a Psychoscanner, he was supposed to know his own patterns well enough to keep his reactions to others well in check, and it was especially necessary to do so now. Besides, this wasn't getting him anywhere; if Lang knew anything, Reeder would have to

discover what it was by craft, not direct questioning.

As Reeder calmed again, and thought somewhat wistfully of his regular, routine job, second-nature forced him to beginning building a mental picture of Lang's probable psych-patterns. He didn't need any of his usual equipment to form a good estimate. Rather, an estimate that wasn't particularly good, as far as he was concerned; he'd prefer working with a known deviant to an old wreck like this.

Be that as it may, he had to learn things from Lang, as well as telling him a few. They drank, and he got down to tacks.

It was an old story, of course—a kind of thing that went on all the time somewhere or other. The Earth government, center of an as yet loose and shaky galactic empire—almost a potential empire, in fact, but one that would someday be strong and developed—had found through bitter experience that it was unwise to force or help other races to develop technologically at a pace faster than was natural for them. "Unwise" was putting it mildly, in fact; it was often tragic.

In the earliest days, Earthmen had tried to be tutors and bringers of fabulous gifts. They should have known better, since their own discoveries in psychology and sociology had lagged so far behind the physical sciences. The peoples of other stars and planets, whose friendship Earth tried so hard to cultivate, took their shiny new gadgets, half-understood them, and managed to burn themselves badly with them. In the worst cases, they burned their neighbors and the Earthmen themselves as well.

Earth couldn't stop expanding outward, of course; it had, unlike any other race encountered so far, a basically explosive culture—stable if it could go on growing and exploring, but unstable if confined. Discovering and exploring new worlds was eco-

nomically necessary and an integral part of the business of being Men. But gradually man learned that expansion had to be accomplished very carefully indeed.

Earth still tried to help alien races in every possible way—but that did not include wonderful gifts in any tangible sense. Men came to new worlds, perhaps left emissaries and explorers behind if they could be fitted into the culture. In every case they left a matter-transmitter gate, to make future visits easy, and a gate-keeper like Lang, instructed to make himself as inconspicuous and compatible as possible.

Gadgets, no. It was against the law to sell or even give away any that the culture of the planet in question could not have developed by itself. That left leeway; Earth could manufacture a planet's own devices better and cheaper in most cases. Still, the law was often broken; and it was not easy to catch the offenders. In many cases, it wasn't difficult to spot machinery and conveniences that residents of a given planet or system had not developed themselves—to find the source, and the criminal back to Earth for punishment—but it became exciting, at times.

It became tricky, too, when the fabulous inventions that turned up were developed by a genuine extra-terrestrial genius years ahead of his time. But that didn't happen often; such geniuses were usually born to blush unseen. The sharp operators who sold stuff to the natives—at fantastically high prices, of course—in most cases had sense enough to stick to super-duper can-openers, anti-gravity belts, fission weapons, and other things that were slightly advanced over the planet's own products, but not far enough ahead to be too noticeably different and frightening.

"I'll be frank with you," Reeder told Lang, still maintaining his superior attitude. "The authorities back home are wondering why you haven't

reported anything wrong out here. You're supposed to keep your eyes open, you know, even if you do find it wise to live as much like a hermit as possible. What facts they do have, I understand, came from the fellows in the mining base on this planet's moon.

"Of course, the information could easily be wrong; they can only make long-distance observations. But it looks as if some funny things have been going on here, and it may go hard with you if you've been lax in your duties. I'll do my best for you, but I'll have to report the facts as I find them."

LANG'S throaty, somehow damp-sounding chuckle was becoming more and more irritating. Now he repeated it again. "Lagnoupe has a world government," he said, apparently irrelevantly. "Yup, a world government. One dictator runs the whole darned she-bang. And he's worse than any dictator you ever read about in yer history books, son. Much worse."

"I've heard of Coster The Magnificent," replied Reeder, irritated. "What of it?"

"Lots of it," Lang went on. "Lots of it, though I don't expect it to mean anything to you. Coster runs a thoroughly militarized world—a planet where the poor people have nothing to live for but to serve his magnificence—ugh! They work in factories from the time they're small children. They earn practically nothing and have no pleasures at all. The people who run the factories, industries, and such, do so only because Coster feels like letting them; they pay him practically everything they take in, in taxes..."

"I know all that," Reeder snapped; "I can't see that it has anything to do with the situation, or our jobs."

"Dad-burn your ornery hide!" Lang spat. "It's Coster who has kept this civilization as backward as it is—him and his regimentation of everything.

The whole place is as downtrodden as you can get. If Coster wasn't in the pilot's seat, this civilization could go ahead—make some progress. The people certainly deserve a break, and they're intelligent enough to make progress. But Coster's ancestors got control of things long ago, and kept them through force ever since. It ain't right. Personally, I like the people here, and I'd like to see somebody give 'em gadgets until they saw what they were missing. They'd rise up and throw Coster and his bully gang out if they knew better—they've just never had a chance to learn. Some interference might be a good idea, here—it would free a whole darned planet from tyranny!"

Reeder stood up, drawing himself very stiff and straight and fixing Lang with a cold eye. "Your political opinions have nothing to do with the matter," he said deliberately. "Earth has learned from experience, and makes its laws for the good of all. If anyone is selling or giving the natives devices they haven't made themselves, it's up to you to report all you know about it—and up to me to see that it's stopped. I'll expect your cooperation while I do my duty. Perhaps if you're helpful, I'll be able to make my final report more favorable to you—if not, I'm afraid it will result in your removal."

Lang only chuckled again. "Oh, I'll be glad to help, son," he said. "I know you've gotta do your job. Lessee, you'll need native costume. The lockers are in the wall behind you. I guess it'll be easy enough to find your size."

The gate-keeper blundered forward looking helpful, surprisingly so—but Reeder didn't wait for him; he strode to the lockers and flung back the doors. The native costume was simple indeed, rough and plain in fact, and constructed on the principle of the toga. Reeder disliked its feel against his skin. He'd come through the gate wearing only shorts—since he'd have had to change here, anyway.

One thing he was thankful for; no physical disguise was necessary. Reeder considered that wearing false antennae, skin-coloring, or a few extra limbs would be thoroughly repugnant. Physical differences between Earthmen and Lagnoupians existed, but they did not show on the surface, when clothing was worn.

The final item, an "identity card," was interesting. Lagnoupe I had psychiatrists, and they had been forced to work under extreme pressure to produce certain items and systems. Lang noticed Reeder's interest and went into further detail about it. Most of this detail consisted of one thing, however: a repeated reference to the average Lagnoupian as a "pushbutton man."

A surprisingly complex psych-pattern was imprinted into the card, invisible beneath its surface. In the case of a Lagnoupian, this would correspond to what the rulers had discovered to be normal for him. Lagnoupe security police, who represented a large segment of the population, were reportedly armed with semi-portable scanning boxes. A citizen could be stopped at any time and forced to submit to a rescanning, with his identity-card setting up the basic pattern in the box. If he appeared to be deviating from that pattern in any significant way, he was hauled in for thorough and painful questioning. It was a neat system; Reeder admired it, and was glad he didn't have to live under it normally.

ONCE FULLY equipped, Reeder left Lang abruptly, saying he'd be back to sleep unless on the trail of something really hot. In the street, he got a further inkling of why he had been drafted for this job; most of the inhabitants were tall and skinny like himself. Reeder didn't see how this could be due to gravity, which was barely noticeably lighter than Earth normal—but he didn't waste much time wondering. He was too busy try-

ing to look like an inhabitant himself.

Strolling idly down the street was not the way to accomplish this. Everybody was hurrying, purposeful, and haggard. Most were on foot, and looked as if they were on their way to or from work, physical work.

The buildings, for the most part, were functional to the point of ugliness. A few were outstandingly different; most of these were stores, built in fantastic shapes purely to attract attention. A Lagnoupian couldn't buy much in the way of comforts or luxuries, of course. But there was plenty of evidence that a lot of the city's planning had been done by born advertising-men.

It made sense, when you thought about it; Coster wanted to maintain the status quo, without making it too obvious to the average citizen that there was one—so he saw to it that whatever could be bought was ballyhooed to the hilt. The citizen paid for the advertising, which helped keep him poor. Reeder was beginning to speculate on the taxes and restrictions that must apply to manufacturers and industrialists, to keep them in their proper places as well, when his guess was confirmed.

The air was suddenly filled with floating bubbles of many colors, each twice the size of a man's head. Reeder almost ducked to avoid one, but noticed that nobody else was doing so. He held his breath as the bubble settled on his shoulders, completely surrounding his head. A green one.

It was transparent, and made Reeder feel as if he were under water. Then the bubbles revealed its purpose. Bright yellow lettering (*Reeder had learned hypnotically to speak and read Lagnoupian, of course*) swam across its inner surface before his eyes. **COSTER LOVES CLEANLINESS,** it said. **BE CLEAN. USE KOREN'S SOAP.**

The bubble burst, vanishing completely, and Reeder gulped air. There

were still plenty of others floating around, and he started to walk away from the neighborhood, briskly. The things were annoying, and he hoped he wouldn't encounter many of them. The Lagnoupians, though, paid no more attention than an Earthman did to a solar-sign.

He headed for the waterfront. At least, he hoped he was remembering the map he'd studied, and was going in the right direction; the docks should be a good place to find the type of undercover activity he was looking for.

Gradually, he became aware that someone was following him.

A SERIES of brief, surreptitious glances finally assured him that it was not a policeman. After he was sure of this, he realized that a policeman on this world would be more direct and demanding, anyway. This was a ratlike, greasy little fellow. Reeder tagged him as dangerous, quickened his pace. The pursuer kept his distance until they were deep in a maze of narrow, smelly alleys among the waterfront warehouses. Then, with a suddenness that startled the Earthman, he drew up beside Reeder.

"Those ad-bubbles are new to you, eh *stranger*?" His voice was confidential.

Reeder forced himself to nod calmly. "In from the country," he said. "Tired breaking my back farming."

"Registered for employment?" the little man asked.

Reeder contrived to look somewhat sly and worried at the same time. "Nope," he admitted. "I don't want them to shove me right into a factory. I'll ship out if I have to, but what I want is something soft and profitable—even if it's a little dangerous."

The man nodded. "Thinking of saving up for a trip to Lagnoupe II?" he asked, and laughed harshly. He kept clawing at Reeder's arm, and the Earthman hoped he hadn't noticed his

involuntary start at the question. If ordinary pleasures were unknown on Lagnoupe I, leaving the planet to go to Lagnoupe II was absolutely forbidden; attempts were punishable by instant execution. Which was somewhat silly, since there were no privately-owned spacecraft anyway, and rockets belonging to the government were outfitted for commerce or defense rather than carrying passengers to pleasure worlds.

"Maybe I am," Reeder answered. "Heard it's tough to get there, but it ought to be worth it." He hoped fervently that his companion would rise to the bait.



The man laughed again. "Hard, unless you've got a couple of million credits," he grated. "But it ain't impossible; come on along!"

With this, he dived abruptly into a dark passageway. Reeder followed, feeling his way cautiously. Boards creaked beneath his feet as if they would give way; there was a smell of dust, garbage and worse in the musty air; and the walls where he touched them were slimy and covered with cobwebs.

He followed the sounds of scraping feet and rasping breath for what seemed like several minutes, constantly on the alert for a trap. Finally, to his immense relief, a crack of light appeared in front of him and widened, then was partially obscured again as his companion went through another doorway into an interior room. Reeder followed. The place was without windows or any other ventilation, and could be called clean only in comparison with the foul hallway they had come through. It was furnished with a rickety table, some dilapidated

chairs, and a pile of blankets in one corner. The light came from an overhead bulb of an electric type that looked ancient to Reeder.

It struck him that something was wrong about this set-up—not in the illegal sense, but the logical one.

THE MAN—now that Reeder could see him more plainly he turned out to be immensely ugly and pockmarked—sat down and motioned the tall Earthman to a chair. Reeder took it gingerly, still ready to go into action if this turned out to be an ambush of some kind.

"You can call me Gar," said his companion.

"Ruskin," Reeder said in reply. The other waited, but Reeder wasn't going to give out any further information unless asked directly. He didn't want to say the wrong thing, and he didn't much like lying anyway—but most of all, he knew that people in the dregs of a society like this one didn't volunteer information about themselves as a rule, and to do so would simply be to invite suspicion.

Gar produced a bottle from somewhere, and shoved it across the table. "Swig?"

Reeder nodded without speaking, took a healthy gulp. He didn't swallow until the other had followed suit, although the powerful stuff was threatening to burn the lining of his mouth completely out and remove the enamel from his teeth to boot. It was straight, and it was powerful—but at least it wasn't doped.

"Good stuff," Reeder managed to say appreciatively. Gar nodded, as if Reeder had managed to pass a difficult test and could now be accepted fully. He belched.

Finally Gar came to the point. He leaned heavily on the table and sent a blast of reeking breath into Reeder's face. "You seem to be okay," he said. "I'm warnin' ya, though, if you don't want to get into something really big—and maybe chancey—this deal isn't

for you. But if we pull it off, we'll not only have all the dough we could possibly want, but power, too—all the power there is, as a matter of fact. We'll be the government!"

"You mean a revolution to overthrow Coster?" Reeder was genuinely impressed, but also somewhat bewildered. In any event, it was no part of his task to meddle in local politics—on either side—unless some Earthman, or other outsider, were behind some sort of plot.

"Right!" Gar said, smugly. "It's time us poor downtrodden workers got a break." (Reeder wondered briefly what Gar had ever worked at.) "Now things are goin' to be different. Those slobs in their palaces have snapped the whip long enough—it's time we took a turn at it, and that's just what we're goin' to do!"

Reeder assumed an expression of doubtful interest. "What makes you think you can succeed?"

Gar's face went sly, and he made a quick search of the dingy little room with his eyes. He leaned even farther over the table, and brought his hand from inside his jacket front. "Look!" he said importantly.

Reeder looked, and his surprise and interest were entirely genuine. Gar's hand held what seemed to be a weapon. It was not exactly like any weapon Reeder had ever seen before, but it was also quite obviously far beyond the technology of Lagnoupe I. Small, deadly-looking, beautifully machined—it cuddled coily in Gar's gnarled hand as if it were a living, vibrant thing.

"Impressed, eh?" Gar continued, wisely. "You'll be even more impressed in a minute; watch!"

He arose, walked to a side wall on unsteady feet. Reeder began to get apprehensive; Gar must have been drinking heavily before they met. Gar's next move was odd; he commenced kicking at the wall near the floor, and Reeder hunched in his chair, ready for anything.



THERE WAS a scraping noise, then a small animal emerged from a hole at the base of the wall, several feet away from Gar. It scuttled out into the room, hesitated, and looked about itself in some bewilderment. It had six legs and not much tail, but otherwise was very much like an Earth rat.

The hot blue flash did not seem to come from the weapon at all, but from the animal itself. It did not last long. Reeder just had time to blink his eyes against the glare, and then the glare was gone; so was the animal. There was a dry black powder drifting about, one thick cloud of it where the animal had been sending out spiralling waves which grew more diffuse, harder to watch. And then the whole thing was indistinguishable from the dust in the room.

Reeder shuddered.

Reeder was examining his store of knowledge about the civilization of Lagnoupe I; it seemed obvious that this fantastic weapon could not be a product of the planet, and it wouldn't hurt to accept the obvious tentatively, and try to find the source of the weapon.

But he'd already seen that much of the "facts" known about Lagnoupe I were to be regarded with suspicion; there was no evidence of the ultra-tight, spy-ridden, super-efficient dictatorship he'd heard so much of. Where were the police when a stranger appeared on the streets, to be accosted by an obviously suspicious character and lured away?

And what kind of revolutionist against such a tyranny would be able to hole up so simply, let alone tell his secrets to a stranger?

Well, the social situation, whatever it was, and the revolution, whatever that was, was none of Reeder's business—but the weapon was another matter!

He said several words, unconnected but forceful. Then came a complete sentence: "Let me see that thing!"

Gar held up a hand in a stop signal, dirty palm outward, while he shoved the weapon inside his jacket again. "Take it easy, chum," he said. "You'll have one of your own, if the big shots pass on you okay. Meantime, it's healthiest not to get too curious. Just take it easy for now, and you'll get your chance soon enough."

It had all the earmarks of a show put on for his benefit. Rather than chance his finding out too much, they might be showing him this right off the bat—then it would reduce their problem either to bribery or murder. He decided to put on an appearance of cooperativeness until he could find more about "them", as well as the weapon.

Reeder's act called for another healthy pull on the bottle, and he really needed it. He made a big business out of it, finished off with a swipe at his chin with the back of his hand.

"Okay," he said. "You're the wheel. But that sure is quite a play-toy; never saw anything like it. Your big shot inventors or something?"

Gar permitted himself a wink. "You'll find out," he said. "Tonight."

And that was as far as Reeder could get, for the present. Gar, it developed, was out to find all the recruits he could. He instructed Reeder to turn up at an old warehouse, not far away, that evening, and left him in the alley again.

REEDER waited until his questionable companion was out of sight, then idled slowly in another direction. He had no intention of spending the day on the streets, however, nor did he intend to waste any time working

on the lead he had uncovered, if he could help it.

He bought food and drink—non-alcoholic—from a sidewalk vendor, thinking that he'd probably need a new interior when this adventure was finished if the stuff was as unhealthy as it looked. Making a compact package of the food, he slung it from his loose, wide belt. Then, by a circuitous route, he approached the warehouse.

Reaching the roof was not difficult. The buildings in the neighborhood were so close to collapse that their walls and pillars provided a number of surfaces that were easy to climb even for a man in Reeder's merely fair physical condition. He used a chimney as a ladder for most of the distance, hopped to the top of a brick wall when the chimney became a sooty pipe, and finished by edging his way cautiously up the angle formed by the walls of two buildings. He was panting harshly when he got through.

Then, almost immediately, he discovered that if he had gone around a corner into another alley, he would have been provided with a fire-escape all the way from the ground up to the roof.

The task that consisted, now, of waiting.

He settled himself in the shade of a corrugated metal shack built on one corner of the warehouse roof. There were skylights aplenty, he observed, but they were completely obscured by the dirt of months and years. There was no use in trying to get a full picture of the inside of the place yet, anyway. Later in the day, he'd sneak in and find a good spot from which to spy on the meeting.

If he were going to play the game, he might as well be simple-minded, too—until he found out what lay behind this cloak-and-dagger exterior.

The morning passed. Reeder ate and drank. The sun stood high overhead, its rays beating down with considerable intensity. Reeder yawned, stretched, shifted to positions he hoped would be more comfortable—but still

uncomfortable enough to keep him awake.

All vestiges of shade vanished entirely. Reeder yawned some more. He started to invent a time machine, drawing mental plans and calculations but it was too hot for such serious thinking. He turned to ticking off the dates of historic wars in his head. After a while he caught himself drowsing, his brain merely going tick-tick-tick instead of doing any thinking. He snapped himself awake, and held on for a while longer. Then he ran out of cigarettes. He thought about leaving his post for a time, going down the fire-escape, and getting more. It wasn't really worth it, since Lagnoupian cigarettes tasted like an old beard soaked in bean soup, and left to dry in the heat of a garbage incinerator; but still, the trip might keep him awake.

Thinking this, he fell asleep.

A CHILL in the air woke Reeder up, eventually. He had been lying on his back in a cramped position: the waking-up process was a long and difficult one. He didn't start examining the surroundings, though he was aware of darkness and a breeze, for some time. There was the very important business of straightening out his neck, hauling himself painfully to a standing position, and restoring a small amount of circulation to his body to be attended to first.

This was actually fortunate; otherwise he might have left what little shelter the metal shed provided without any precaution whatever. As it was, he became aware of voices—one sharp and demanding, another whining and plaintive. Somebody, it became apparent, was placing somebody else under arrest, and the second somebody was trying to talk his way out of it.

Reeder stuck one eye cautiously around the corner of the shack. There was a very large man in a black uniform not far from his position; this individual was holding a gun on a

small, ragged fellow who cowered before him. Reeder was not particularly surprised to recognize his buddy of the morning, Gar.

Gar was saying, "Please don't take me to the grill, sir. I didn't mean nuthin'. I'm really a good fellow, sir—just sick, so's I haven't been able to work for a while. That's all—just sick. Can't blame me for that, can you, sir? I hate to be unproductive, I really do. But I only come up here to find a place to sleep, the tough boys in this neighborhood might stick a slicer in me while I sleep if I don't hide out. I just want to sleep, that's all. I wouldn't hurt anybody's property, or steal anything. I'll go away right now, and find me a cush under the docks, I will. Don't arrest me..."

It was somewhat sickening, so much corn before he was fully awake; and it could just as easily have gone on and on indefinitely, Reeder thought, but the uniformed man interrupted.

"That'll be enough!" he snapped. "You'll come along with me quietly or else! We know all about your little organization that's meeting here tonight—and this is going to be the end of it. Your trying to sneak in over the roof isn't going to save you, or help your friends. We're closing in any minute now. If you're good, I'll just put the nabs on you and leave you here—but I can knock you out if you insist! Well?"

Reeder made a decision. He didn't like Gar, and had nothing against the cop; but Gar was his one contact with that strange weapon. He couldn't afford to lose that contact, even though it looked as if they were waiting for him to answer the cue. He had to do his job as quickly as possible if weapons like that were flooding the planet, and he wanted to get himself out of a chore that had become thoroughly distasteful.

On the other hand, he doubted that this was going to be easy. If the cop had had his back to Reeder, everything would have been fine. As it was, Reeder was almost exactly broadside

to the two men, the uniformed one coming little closer to facing him, if anything.

Reeder stepped back slightly to consider, and almost fell over the paper sack containing the remains of his lunch. The bright idea followed instantly. It was the oldest trick in the book, of course, but its very age could be a point in its favor, now.

Reeder picked up the bag and stepped forward again. Without hesitation, he made an underhanded pitch; the bag flew a few feet, hit the surface of the roof, and continued to skid along for a fair distance. The noise it made was perfect: a rustling, skittering scrape—a bunch of inferior bread, cheese and fruit giving the impression that someone was sneaking up quietly behind the cop, accidentally allowing a foot to rub the roof too harshly.

Reeder charged as the cop whirled. There was a burst of frenzied action.

ODDLY, REEDER probably would have succeeded much more easily if Gar hadn't been galvanized into action, too. But the ratlike little man darted in at the same time as Reeder did; the cop whirled back as they came, lifting his gun to meet their individual charges, but confused about where to aim.

The three met head-on and went down in a heap. There was a good deal of struggling, biting, punching, kicking and clawing. Reeder got a foot in the groin and saw novas; damned right—the game called for genuine rough-stuff. He doubled up, trying only to protect himself momentarily, and rolled a few feet away from the struggle.

A glance when his vision cleared convinced him that Gar was getting the worst of it, and he made ready to plunge in again in spite of the pain he felt. Reeder had only raised himself to one knee, however, when Gar broke away from the cop, bucketed backwards a few feet, and pulled his deadly little weapon.

That awful hot-blue flash came

again, much bigger this time, lighting up a large section of the roof. The cop disappeared in a haze of messy black smoke as Reeder shielded his eyes and stayed put.

There were yells from a number of surrounding roof-tops, the sound of many running feet. Reeder blinked, dazedly.

Then Gar's bony little fingers were biting into his arm again, and Gar was whispering frantically. "Come on, for grape's sake! Shake it! We've gotta get out of here! That blast will have the cops on our necks in a sec!"

Reeder got to his feet and let Gar shove him forward ignominiously. He was beginning to pull himself together when his stumbling feet encountered the edge of a trapdoor set into the roof.



Gar raised the hatch and made fierce motions for Reeder to go through it. He hesitated, saw there was a ladder leading down, and went ahead. Gar followed, taking time to fasten the trap as securely as possible before joining Reeder.

They were on a kind of rickety catwalk rigged precariously to the wall of a huge storeroom. The place seemed to be empty, but Reeder couldn't be sure; it was so damnably dark. Gar moved up close beside him, produced a pocket-light, and flashed it once along the snaky length of the walk, which wavered away indefinitely into the gloom, looking sentient and resentful of the intruders on its back. Then Gar flicked the light off again, and they started forward as hastily as they could. The ratlike fellow seemed to know his way around, but Reeder's training had not included tight-wire walking, and he kept pace with his

companion only with considerable trouble.

Gar began whispering, almost as if talking to himself, in a voice Reeder found it hard to follow. "Not the meeting room," the Earth agent made out. "Gang's in the sub-cellar. No use trying the warn 'em—either the bully-boys will make enough ruckus to tip 'em off in time and they'll get out—or the cops'll succeed and they'll be done for. Save ourselves—first thing. Revolution's over for now, but I've still got my gun. Lay low till this blows, and start over."

THEY REACHED the end of the catwalk, started down a flight of rickety stairs. Moving fast but breathing carefully, they finally got to a floor—obviously old and splintery, but gratifyingly solid. Then there was a series of small rooms, and a tunnel with walls of damp stone, more rooms with windows high up in the walls, and a flight of steps leading upward. Somehow they had gotten below ground level without Reeder's having been fully aware of it.

Then they were outside again, in an area of the city that looked the same as the one containing the warehouse, but smelled subtly different. Reeder now ascertained that they were somewhat farther from the waterfront when they strolled casually around a corner into a district of semi-respectable looking taverns and cafes.

To carry off the pretense of being a couple of buddies out on the town, they stopped for a drink in a dingy den. Reeder decided to try a propaganda campaign. Gar listened intently, and with increasing pleasure.

"So you see," Reeder wound up, "that the former leaders of this business won't dare to try again for a long while, even if they aren't captured or worse by now. There's no reason why you shouldn't be able to run the same sort of show; no reason at all. I'm with you, and I'm sure you can line up plenty of others."

Gar considered, ambition and avarice flickering plainly across his face. Taking another swig from his hefty mug, he thumped the table. "Right!" he said. "I knew you were a man who recognized a good thing when he saw one. You'll be my first lieutenant. We can start rounding up our gang right away."

"Sure," Reeder said thoughtfully. "But what about weapons. Can you get more of them?"

Gar looked craftier, leaned closer, and Reeder steeled himself to endure the man's heavy breathing. Gar spoke briefly, gave him an address, and told him how to find the place.

"Got any cash?" he asked, and continued at Reeder's nod. "You go there and pick one up for yourself, then. When we begin to get some—er—contributions, we'll really set up an arsenal..."

When they parted soon afterwards, Reeder was pretty well satisfied; he was on the way to finding out where those weapons came from. Something told him that any real danger would start from there. He could use some sleep—but that didn't matter now.

He went through a crowded district where laborers were just leaving the factories—they have started at sunrise and continued till after sundown. This much of the set-up didn't seem wrong—the commoners *were* overworked. Reeder wondered, idly, how the bosses and big-shots spent their money; they must have considerable, even if they were heavily taxed by the government—a moot point.

He recalled Gar's mention of Lagnoupe II, which was reputed to be a world almost solely devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, and the fleecing of pleasure-seekers. A man with money could find there every imaginable form of recreation, gaiety, and vice. But Lagnoupe II didn't have to go looking for customers, and there was no way for the citizens of Lagnoupe I to get there, with the government controlling off-world transportation completely. Uh-huh!

Reeder's reflections broke off rather sharply. There was something vaguely puzzling about the neighborhood he was getting into; something he soon recognized as a sense of familiarity.

Then he turned another corner and realized what was nagging at his thoughts.

Gar had directed him to the rear entrance of the residence of old Obad Lang, the Earth "embassy" himself.



SO THAT was it! A simple explanation, but it fitted all the evidence. Everyone "knew" that Lagnoupe was an ironbound dictatorship—but *what was the source of their information?* Obviously, the resident ambassador.

Suppose it wasn't; suppose it was actually what it appeared to be on the surface—a backward civilization, where the commoners was definitely held down and overworked. But not, apparently, exploited beyond endurance—then, a super secret police wouldn't be necessary; occasional malcontents like Gar would arise, and the regular police could handle them, since they wouldn't get much support.

Unless they had super weapons.

Reeder stopped thinking, now, bitter rage seething through him as he stormed into the innocent-looking little building.

He found Lang in a comfortably furnished living-room, sipping a drink and listening to tinkly music coming from an invisible radio set. Hauling up short in front of the old man, he hauled himself up straight and looked daggers. "You," he snapped furiously, "are under arrest!"

Lang looked at him with mild curiosity, took another sip of his drink, and set the glass down on a small table beside his chair. He waved a hand

the general direction of one wall, and the music died until it was barely audible, though still there as a background.

"Do tell," said Obad Lang. "You mean that air-bus conductor I punched twenty years ago on Earth has finally found out where I am and put in a complaint—or is it one of my ex-wives again?" He grinned as if savoring pleasant memories.

"Don't be funny!" Reeder went on, icily. "You know what the charges are—although maybe you don't know how many of them there will be at that! Interfering with the course of an alien civilization; selling illegal gadgets to extra-terrestrial natives; not reporting the development of a new weapon to Security; illegal possession and distribution of weapons; use of Earth Government property for personal purposes; subversion of Earth's foreign policies; treason; revolution..."

Lang's eyes widened in what looked like genuine surprise. "Who, me?" he asked, still mildly.

"You," said Reeder. "Furthermore, I intend to take you back to Earth immediately to answer charges, and..."

Lang began to grin faintly again, and also began an elaborate business of lighting an old-fashioned water-pipe filled with an exotic tobacco and an even more exotic-looking liquid. "Got proof, I suppose?" he drawled slyly.

Reeder hesitated. Did he have proof? Well, Gar had directed him here, and Gar... Gar just could have been playing a berle on him, at that; and, come to think of it, Reeder had no idea of how he was supposed to get in touch with the new revolutionary leader again. Perhaps the little meteor-worm had taken Reeder's idea of usurping the seat of government and decided to use it, but not to use Reeder. A phoney address would be the quickest way to get rid of him, and this particular address would be a natural to anyone with any kind of a sense of humor at all.

Reeder decided to tell Lang the

whole story—watching his reactions carefully while he did so, of course, and trying to trick him into making admissions of anything he knew about the whole business...

He did so, Lang listened intently, making interested comments, but never once failing to act surprised at the proper places, never betraying any foreknowledge of what Reeder was going to say, never falling into any of Reeder's traps. Reeder wound up feeling breathless, discouraged, and angry at himself.

Lang leaned back, blowing clouds of aromatic, varicolored smoke. He was silent for a time, then said: "Watch this." He puffed out his cheeks, blew slowly and carefully, and produced a rosy cloud, containing what seemed to be a shadow-picture of a voluptuous nude woman, reclining and wriggling her body tantalizingly.

"Pretty good, eh?" Obad bragged. "Takes a lot of practice to be able to do that. Anybody can make flowers that last a couple of seconds, but..."

"Very interesting," Reeder said in a hurt voice. "And amusing. I'm sure you've had lots of time to practice it. But the business at hand strikes me as a little bit more important just now. Do you know anything about it or don't you? I warn you that I have considerably more power than you, and my testimony as to what you say will be accepted as official evidence. So?"

LANG LEANED back even farther, so that Reeder had difficulty in seeing his face. "Well," he said, "I'll tell thee everything I can; there's little to relate..." He broke off and went into a paroxysm of laughing, which Reeder thought would never stop. Finally, however, it trailed off; Lang subsided into silence except for an occasional chuckle.

"I fail to see anything so uproarious," Reeder said stiffly, when he thought Lang was again capable of hearing and understanding.

The old man propped himself up a little further and looked at Reeder, wiping moisture from his eyes. "Nothing, nothing," he chuckled. "Just an old quotation that suddenly struck me as being applicable. I wonder, I wonder—pretty good so far, maybe it'll follow through. *An aged, aged man a-sitting on a gate—that's me. But I was thinking of a way to dye one's whiskers green—that's you, disguising yourself as a native of Lagnoupe. Heh-heh, the old boy was quite a prophet...*"

Reeder felt himself growing stiffer and hotter. "If all his has anything to do with the case," he snapped, "you had better tell me what it is! If not, you will please get back to the subject?"

"Exactly, exactly," Lang went on. "But I'm warning you, I won't stand for it if you try to thump me on the head. No sir!"

"Now, look. Obviously this Gar friend of yours was just trying to throw you off the track. He may even have decided that you were a spy for Coster—in any case, he's probably in no mood to trust anybody just now. He'll be hiding out for weeks, if not shipping out—or I miss my guess. Meantime, if you're going to keep on with your hunt, you'll have to find a new angle—and a subtler one. You can't go charging around trumpeting like a grockollumph, the way you've been doing, and expect to get anywhere."

Reeder was not in a mood to be easily distracted, either. "Then I take it you deny any guilt in the distribution of those weapons, and any knowledge of where they're coming from?" he said, making his voice as official as he could get.

Lang still had surprises left in him. "Guilt—yes," he said. "Knowledge—no. I don't deny knowledge—but don't jump on me for that; it's knowledge I wouldn't have considered as meaning anything until you told me your story. Now I can add up a few things and get some answers. In fact, I think I

can tell you who your guilty party is. Yes, I think I can!"

Reeder waited, but Lang had fallen into another of his silences. At last the old man rose and started putting aimlessly about the room. "Past my bedtime," he mumbled. "Long past my bedtime." He kept on putting, acting as if he were putting out a non-existent cat, locking doors that were already locked, and winding a clock that actually ran on broadcast power.

Reeder almost blew up then. "If you know who the culprit is—how about telling me?" he said, much louder than necessary.

Lang looked at him directly, still smiling. "Time enough for that in the morning," he grinned happily. "Want to sleep on it tonight?"

And that was all Reeder could get out of him. The old man showed the young Earth agent to a sleeping-room, and soon his own snores were coming through the wall. Reeder tossed and turned for what seemed like hours before he got to sleep, but finally he succumbed too. He'd had quite a day.

LANG WOKE him for breakfast the next morning with a minimum of ceremony, by deflating his mattress and yelling in his ear that breakfast was ready. Reeder remembered that one of his last thoughts before going to sleep had been a resolution to try to worm some of Lang's secrets out of him subtly—by kind and gentle treatment instead of using his authority to make demands. It seemed a less attractive idea in the light of day, but Reeder swore to himself under the shower and decided to try it anyway.

Lang served a breakfast that was excellent—like, Reeder thought tritely, those that Mother's Pneumo-Tube Food Deliveries, Inc., back on Earth used to serve. The two men exchanged pleasant conversation and became positively friendly.

"Well," Lang said as he burned the dishes, "I reckon you'll want to get right back on the job ag'in?"

Reeder nodded. "I'd better, after wasting all day yesterday."

Lang smiled again, and stroked his beard benevolently. He made his teetery way back to the table, poured more coffee, and sat down with his chin propped on his hands before speaking again.

"I wouldn't say you wasted yesterday," he said at last. "I've been putting together some things I happen to know, with what you told me last night, and I think I can tell you who your man is—who's importing and dealing out those weapons."

Reeder showed his surprise.

"You see, I know something about Gar, and the people he's been connected with in the past and has dealings with most often now. Most of his acquaintances are small fry like himself, of course, but it's highly significant that one of them is a very big, rich man indeed—the kind of man who could afford a lot of those weapons, which must be very expensive, don't you think?"

Reeder could find no grounds for disagreement, but he still couldn't help feeling that there was still more wrong with the set-up. Why, for instance, had the old man changed his attitude—and even his speaking habits—so completely since the previous morning? And then too, where did he get all this information he was now tossing around so freely? It was odd—and Reeder was afraid the old fellow wouldn't come out of it with a clean nose and a whole skin. He'd have to mention Lang's peculiar behavior in his final report back on Earth, after all.

That last thought sent a perceptible start through him. Perhaps, he thought, Lang was figuring the same way he was—and sending him into a trap. Well, he'd be damned careful.

He looked at Lang closely, but the old man apparently hadn't noticed Reeder's start. Lang put down his coffee cup and continued.

"George Stearns Millgrim is a rich manufacturer of kitchen furniture—~~for~~ for Lagnoupe I, that is, and that

can be pretty rich, even if there aren't many ways here for citizens to spend money. But—I happen to know—Millgrim is taking a little trip today, to use up some of his money in one of the few ways available to him. You, could go along on that trip too; it would be a perfect chance for you to observe him in action, and perhaps get some evidence on his illegal dealings."

Reeder reflected again that Lang suddenly just "happened to know" an awful lot of things, but he said: "Sounds like a good idea. Where's he going?"

Lang smiled slyly, and licked his lips. He snorted loudly for no good reason that Reeder could see before he went on. Then, "To Lagnoupe II," he said simply.

"**B**UT THAT'S supposed to be impossible!" Reeder exclaimed. "It's impossible to leave this planet—strictly forbidden—can't be done! The government doesn't permit people to leave on its ships, and it has all the ships."

"Not all," Lang replied. "Not *quite* all. There's at least one they don't own—a strictly-illegal ship owned by a strictly-illegal outfit. They run trips to Lagnoupe II regularly, and they have plenty of customers who want to have a good time, for once in their lives. It's risky for them to operate the service, of course, but they make up for it by the fabulous prices they charge. You can see how expensive it is for the customers, because everything on Lag II costs plenty, too. Still . . . wouldn't *you* want to go, if you lived on this dull, regimented planet, and could afford the trip?"

Reeder had to admit honestly that he would, and that is what he said aloud. Underneath, his mind was rocketing along again. Accepting the surface values of things meant that surprises had come furiously, but he still wasn't really used to them. It wasn't surprising that somebody should want to run such a service as Lang described, or even that somebody should try to—but that somebody

should succeed, under the conditions everyone swore to be the facts, was utterly fantastic. There were simply too many means of tracing spaceships; the Lagnoupe I Government would be down on the outlaws' necks in no time at all.

There was, logic forced him to admit, one other possibility—matter-transmitters. But only Earth had those; no other civilization ever encountered had been able to figure out the principles, mathematics, engineering involved. It was one of the most carefully guarded secrets ever to exist—or was supposed to be, Reeder thought, as he looked narrowly at Lang and wondered just how well some of its guardians could be trusted. It had to be well-guarded, because it was so perfectly adapted to use in wars of conquest, for instance. But that only helped prove that these Lagnoupian outlaws didn't have it; if they did, they could and would use it for bigger, more profitable ends than even their pleasure-trip service. They'd probably use it, in fact, to get themselves off Lagnoupe entirely; who'd want to stay on in such a hellish place if they didn't have to?



REEDER came back-to-Earth to listen to Lang again. "Now, being Earth ambassador is a wonderful thing, in one way," the old man was saying. "I don't have to worry about money—Earth has unlimited credit, naturally, and it's usual for an ambassador to have a large stock of it converted into cash of whatever planet he's on—just for emergencies if for nothing else. Therefore, Sonny, you too can afford a trip to Lagnoupe II. Your program for today, if you agree with me, is to take that trip, along with Millgrim,

and do all the checking you want on him. You can even have yourself a lollapalooza of a good time while you're at it. Neat isn't it?"

Reeder shrugged. It certainly sounded neat, if true. He could take care of himself he'd psyched smarter men than Lang, assuming Lang was involved in this whole plot and was sending him into a trap.

"Okay," he said, "where do I go and who do I see?"

Lang gave him an address, pointed out the place to him on the map. Being extremely solicitous, he showed Reeder three-d photos of Millgrim, so there could be no possible mistake. With all apparent sincerity, he wished Reeder good luck. Reeder returned his farewells cordially, but frowned as he went on his way; Lang had an angle somewhere—and the questions of what and where nagged him unmercifully.

The building he reached, eventually, was a large, fairly-new one in the middle of the city; it had the exterior elevators and surrounding passageways common to the latest in Lagnoupian architecture, which succeeding in looking flashily modernistic but utterly impractical. Reeder consulted a directory on the ground floor, a vast, glass-walled expanse, and took an elevator.

A transverse corridor, tube-shaped and made mostly of glass, took him back into the building proper. Following the lighted arrows, he discovered the office he wanted, and touched the number beside its door. The panel slid back and he stepped inside.

Once through the door, the trick lighting, chrome-plate, electronic conveniences, and other such gadgetry almost entirely vanished, as Reeder suspected it did in similar offices all over the planet. The rigid economy here would induce the few operators who could possibly get away with it to fleece the under-sheep like crazy—and do their best to hide the gathered wool from the government. But, Reed-

er deliberately mixed a metaphor, once the fly was in a trap like this one, the spider didn't worry about impressing him any more—he just pounced.

THE FIRST spider to pounce was a good-looking female receptionist. She could have been positively beautiful, but her clothing and make-up were quite severe and plain, like the furnishings of the office itself. The place was ostensibly an insurance-office, which had led Reeder to wonder what the citizens of this planet needed to be insured against, outside of overwork.

"Your pleasure, sir?" asked the receptionist, smiling politely.

Reeder wondered if there were a pass-word or opening gambit he should know, but merely said, "I'd like to see the manager, please."

Apparently, that was all she needed. She smiled a little more and said "Lagnoupe II." Any legitimate insurance-customers who showed shock at hearing that could, Reeder supposed, be thrown off the track easily enough by some stock explanation—perhaps the receptionist just told them to go wash their ears. But what about cops? Wouldn't they clamp down on this organization in a hurry, and wouldn't they enter by the front door just as he had to obtain evidence? Reeder became more wary than ever; there might well be traps in his way yet.

In the inner office, he met a Mr. Cervi, who smiled broadly and said to call him Joe. Yes, the trip to Lagnoupe II could be arranged. No, Reeder couldn't buy a one-way ticket; he had to take, and pay for, the round trip—any unexplained disappearances would lead to too high a probability of police investigation.

And, did Reeder have plenty of cash left over to spend once he got to his destination? Some folks didn't, of course—not realizing how much everything on Lagnoupe II was going to cost them. A pity, of course, but there was nothing Cervi could do about

that; Reeder was a man of the world, obviously, and realized that Cervi's fees had to be high to cover the dangers involved.

And, oh yes, there was one other little matter—Reeder would have to agree to buy some insurance, before leaving. Any old little policy would do. It was just something he could use to explain his visit to this office if it ever became necessary. Cervi just happened to have one ready which could be filled in within a few seconds—no trouble at all...

Reeder thanked his stars for his false address and occupation when he heard this last gimmick. Making one up on the spot would have been difficult and dangerous; most of Reeder's mind was taken up with calculations as to how rapidly he was spending money; figuring rate of exchange had never been one of his strong points. He'd thought the bankroll Lang had given him fantastically large before; now he wished it were even bigger. But he came through with a good pile left, and since he didn't plan to succumb to any more of the pleasures of Lagnoupe II than he had to in order to keep Millgrim in sight, Reeder figured he'd be okay.

Cervi was saying: "And you're prepared to leave on this morning's trip, eh? Good! That's what I like to see, a man of decision who doesn't waste time. There's just one trip a day, you know—when do you plan to return?"

Reeder was a lot less decisive about that; it depended entirely on Millgrim. He mumbled something about having made arrangements for a few days, but that he'd stay as long as his money held out.

Cervi produced a laugh that was almost a shout and clapped Reeder on the back. Reeder grimaced, but Cervi apparently didn't notice. "Good, good!" he said loudly. "You'll have fun; you'll have a lotta fun! You wanta be a bit careful, don't walk into any traps, but you'll have the time of your life! Now, if you'll just step this way..."

HE LED THE way into another room, which looked like a laboratory. A slim, white-jacketed young man approached.

"Another passenger for today's trip, Mok," Cervi told him. "Wanta get him fixed up right away?"

Mok nodded, smiled, and waved silently to a low couch.

Reeder drew back, suspicion clouding his thoughts. "What's that for?" he demanded.

From joviality and back-slapping, Cervi switched to oily solicitude. "Nothing to be afraid of," he said. "Like I said before, Mr. Reeder, you're a man of the world, you understand these things. We must take precautions, you see. We have found it isn't safe even to let our customers know exactly where our ship takes off from, and how to get to the spot. So we're going to ask you to take a harmless little sleeping pill. All it will do will be give you some pleasant dreams, and then you'll be on your way; when you wake up, you'll be almost to Lagnoupe II, and won't have a boring journey to put up with."

Reeder shrugged. He was in this thing now; he might as well play it through. He lifted one corner of his mouth in what passed for a smile of agreement, and lay down on the couch...



He was still on a couch when he woke up, and it took him several seconds to realize it was not the same one. The major difference was not in the couch itself, but in the soft webbing that strapped him to it, and the way the metallic wall curved inward above him. Reeder listened, and the thrum of rockets away and beneath him confirmed his deductions. He was on a spaceship—and finally full memory came back to him. He realized why he was there, and

breathed a sigh of relief that the pill he had taken had not been something deadly.

He unstrapped himself, a tricky bit of maneuvering but possible if you knew how. As Reeder rose, he noted that there were two other bunks containing passengers, plus three empties—of course, there could have been other, similar compartments, but from the apparent size of the ship he doubted it.

One of Reeder's fellow-passengers was easy to recognize as Millgrim himself, a balding, massaged man who looked pompous even in heavy, mumbling sleep. The other was a beautiful redhead, whose green dress clung enticingly to her curves.

Reeder went forward, and entered the pilot's compartment. He was



about to ask a question, when he glanced over the pilot's shoulder and saw that they were already coming in for a landing at a large, modern spaceport. He kept quiet and watched the pilot do a competent job of bringing them in.

Once they were down, the pilot swivelled to him and and nodded in friendly fashion. "Your playmates awake?" he asked.

Reeder shook his head. The two went back into the passenger compartment, where the others were stirring sleepily. Reeder couldn't help concentrating on the redhead; there'd be time for Millgrim later.

The pilot reminded them all that he'd be there at approximately the same time each day until they were ready for the return trip, and they left the ship unceremoniously. Millgrim dallied around the outskirts of

the field for a while, and Reeder tried to do the same without appearing purposeful about it. This was somewhat complicated by the fact that the redhead also lingered, giving Reeder the eye.

REEDER idled in front of a stand, among the many that bordered the field, which had a sign reading: **GUESS YOUR AGE—KSALLIAN IMMORTALS EXCLUDED.** It was an old idea, but the stakes were astonishingly high. Small fortunes seemed to be changing hands regularly. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the planet became apparent immediately.

Finally the redhead gave up and moved off, as Reeder wondered why she had to make a space-trip to have a good time if her sole objective was finding a man. Millgrim was moving off in the opposite direction, and Reeder trailed along, keeping in the middle of crowds as much as possible.

Keeping himself unobtrusive, Reeder joined Millgrim in boarding a mono-rail jet-train bound for the center of the city. The trip was a quick one, and they alighted in the center of a district of theaters and drink palaces. Millgrim stopped for liquid refreshment, and Reeder did the same. He was prepared for almost anything Lagnoupe II had to offer, he thought, but he admitted that the manner in which the drinks were being served by naked and voluptuous girls startled him. Some of the girls had odd appendages, peculiar to other races, but none was hard to look at.

He decided he might as well enjoy himself a little while he was at it—Millgrim certainly wasn't going to leave here in a hurry!

After a while, though, he signaled his waitress that he'd had enough. She told him the price, which was also astonishingly large. Since there

seemed to be no tangible bills or records of any kind, Reeder decided that everyone all the way along the line charged whatever he or she thought the traffic would bear.

He paid anyway, adding a sizeable tip, though to his disappointment the girl didn't even bother to count the money. She pointed out gambling rooms and other pleasures to him, but he turned noncommittal. Millgrim, he noted from the corner of his eye, had also had enough for the present and was heading for the men's room.

That was astonishingly appointed too, with glitteringly decorated and wonderfully comfortable fixtures, and an army of attendants of both sexes who were willing and anxious to wait on Reeder in any conceivable manner.

The trail led outward again. Millgrim seemed to have no definite purpose in mind. They entered a restaurant which served every exotic dish Reeder had ever heard of and more besides. Millgrim chose a table in a nook overlooking a small lake, with a gadget somewhere concealed in it that sent beautiful vari-colored fountains into the air. Each fountain played a tinkly tune as it rose and burst.

They finally left the restaurant behind as well, and strolled along the fabulous main boulevard. There were plenty of peddlers, discrete but insistent, of everything from poison and narcotics to precious gems and intricate carvings. Reeder kept shaking them off, his eyes constantly on the figure of Millgrim. He didn't dare let the rich manufacturer get as far ahead as he'd have liked to, in order to call it a really good job of trailing.

He was startled when someone jogged his elbow rather roughly, since everybody he'd met so far on this planet seemed to be trying to win friends and influence people. He swung—to confront the redhead from Lagnoupe I.



SHE SEEMED to have lost any inhibitions she'd had; probably she'd investigated some of the potent products dispensed in the liquor palaces, too. "Hi," she said gaily. "You look as lonely as I am. That's silly, since we're off the same boat; why don't we team up?"

Reeder sought for logical arguments, and failed to find any that he thought would satisfy the girl. As he stood indecisively, she said, "My name's Wilma. What's yours?"

He said "John Reeder" before he thought, and she linked an arm through his. "Where to?" she asked brightly.

Desperately, Reeder looked around for Millgrim. Perhaps he'd be able to continue the trace job without letting Wilma in on it. He'd shake her at first opportunity, of course; Millgrim would undoubtedly be hitting some places Reeder could never interest the girl in taking in...

But it was already too late, he realized with a shock as the girl chattered on. Millgrim was nowhere to be seen.

He started forward, almost running, in the direction Millgrim had been heading last. To hell with her; let her think whatever she liked, but Reeder had come too far on this trip to write it off as a lost cause.

But Wilma was trotting lithely at his side. Reeder glanced sidewise at her, and began to get a discouraging idea that she could easily outdistance him if she really wanted to; her running style was effortless and spectacular.

They pulled to a halt, Reeder still searching the surrounding crowds, cross streets and doorways wildly.

Then Wilma handed him another surprise blow.

"Let's forget about Millgrim for a while, shall we?" she said. "He'll keep, and I'll be able to pick up his trail again before he does anything important. We can be having a lot of fun in the meantime, instead of wasting our time chasing around like this."

Reeder swung to face her again, angrily now. "Oh yes," he said furiously. "It couldn't be that Millgrim caught on that I was following him, and sent you to trip me up, could it..."

He halted, wondering if it would have been better to deny any knowledge of what she was talking about. If this were all really a carefully-prepared trap—and such a trap could have started with Lang himself, Reeder realized bitterly—about the best thing for him to do would be to play dumb.

There was only one thing left to do: place Wilma under arrest, take her somewhere, and squeeze all she knew out of her somehow. He took her wrist roughly and started to issue a command, but she stopped him again.

"I can see you're not going to trust me, silly boy," she said sweetly. "And if you're not going to trust me, you're not going to be much fun to play with. Will you feel better if I take you to Millgrim right now, and tell you how I knew you were following him. I can also prove to you that I can find him any time I want to—that certainly ought to satisfy you."

It was too much. Reeder could only nod mutely. A sense of having no control whatever of his own fate, or even his own actions, was pressing in on him. Somehow, oddly enough, it was not quite a sense of failure. He felt—somewhere in that whirlpool of conflicting emotions—that, though nothing was going to turn out as he had expected, planned, and hoped, the

end result was going to be all right. Even this, however, he could not analyze; he gave up, and let Wilma have her way.

WILMA stepped to one of the low call-posts that lined the curb-wall of the street. She pressed the top button once, then once again. Within seconds, a robocab came smoothly out of the line of traffic and pulled up beside them.

This too was something to be considered; Wilma's familiarity with the life and gadgets of Lagnoupe II had yet to be explained. Reeder had read the instructions on one of the call-posts—which could be used to summon any type of public service—while trailing Millgrim, but knew his use of it would not have shown the long-practiced ease of the girl.

He stared at her openly after they had entered the low, open but carefully wind-screened cab and were speeding quietly along the broad highway. There was something inexplicably familiar about her.

They pulled up, shortly, at a huge, dome-shaped building, which Reeder cased while Wilma fed punched-ticket money into the cab's register. The low door slid open as she finished. It was a neat system; anybody could grab a ride without paying, merely by going over the side in a hurry at the end of the trip—but he'd only succeed once. Because when he failed to pay, the psycho-recorder that had taken his measure during the ride would retain that imprint permanently; it would be re-recorded throughout the entire cab network, and no cab would operate for the cheat ever again, unless he first paid for the swiped trip and put up a heavy deposit against the next one.

Reeder paid little attention to Wilma's explanation of this, however. The building held his interest—the building and the big sign that said, *HUNTER'S HEAVEN—Stalk and triumph over exact replicas of any*

kind of game animal in the universe. Convincing backgrounds, latest weapons. All the thrills of the real thing in perfect safety. There seemed to be comparatively few customers, although it sounded like fun.

They entered on a rolling ramp. The attendants were robots, who acted more human than they looked. Wilma was still in command of the expedition, although she allowed him to chip in on the price, which was naturally high. She chose their guns, which seemed admirably light and flexible to use, although rather flashily decorated. She selected hunting costumes for them—or selected what she called hunting costumes from the huge stock available; the loose garments were noteworthy for their brevity and transparency, but not as far as Reeder could see for practicality. Wilma decided on the scene of action and the game to be stalked. She became less efficient when they met again outside the dressing rooms, and made a huge production of displaying her charms, but Reeder steeled himself to show little interest. Finally they took another rolling ramp to a room with many doors opening from it, went to the door with their names lit up on it, and went through.



REEDER gasped. He knew they were on a replica of a planet that actually existed, but he doubted if human beings could exist on the real thing outside of highly-specialized pressure-suits. There was almost no solidity to the place; they were standing on something, but the surface seemed mushy and shifting, and all about them was mist.

The mist was smoky grey, and

clammily unpleasant. It took considerable effort to wade through it, and Reeder wondered how they could possibly find Millgrim if he were here too. There was a dreamlike feel of walking on clouds and never advancing beyond one particular spot. An impossible impression that he had gone through this experience before added to Reeder's discomfort.

The mists began to take on pastel colors, which appeared and disappeared hesitantly and blended with no reference to any normal spectrum. It was a noiseless, heatless fireworks display, and it was thoroughly eerie.

Reeder paused thoughtfully, making sure Wilma was still beside him. The colored mists seemed to flicker between them as well as around them, making her form difficult to focus on. But she was still there, and still moving forward with an apparently definite purpose.

This would be, Reeder realized, a perfect place for a murder. If Millgrim were in here somewhere too, there were probably other customers as well—enough to provide plenty of suspects to puzzle the police, assuming the police of Lagnoupe II would take any interest in such an affair at all, which wasn't too likely. And the necessary weapons and complete concealment were handily provided. It was a beautifully frightening set-up.

Reeder made himself as alert as he could, and studied the scene carefully, trying to see evidence of its manufacture in addition to getting a complete picture of what had been manufactured. The scene was changing slightly. The bursting colors were still there, but now they moved more slowly and steadily, in more regular patterns. They seemed to emerge from a common center, not too far away. Reeder felt as if a curtain were about to go up on some sort of display—a display of he knew not what. Expectantly, he watched the point from which the colors came,

keeping a corner of one eye on Wilma, who had hesitated beside him.

The point became a circle of pure golden light. It widened gradually, as the colors surrounding it darkened to a solid black background. The disk shattered and rained away in golden teardrops—and Reeder brought his weapon up to firing position.

A monster floated in space before him, a monster whose form changed as unceasingly as the colors had, but a monster that remained horrible through each variation. It had, for instance, a large number of heads, but the exact number could not be counted; heads seemed to keep appearing and disappearing, and weaving in and out between and around others on sinuous, scaly necks. Each head was different, each ghastly. The body itself boiled and surged like a cooking custard; obscene appendages sprouted, grew, gestured grotesquely—and vanished.

And the entire conglomeration was charging down upon Reeder and Wilma at a terrific speed, bellowing, screaming, steaming, snorting, thumping and roaring as it came.

IT WAS THE roaring that did it. In spite of the oncoming horror, Reeder took the time for a slow, careful glance at Wilma. He knew then where he had seen her before, and he remembered the scene that had been almost the same as this one. Wilma's flowing red hair and the scanty costume were the same. Reeder wondered why it had taken him so long to see this.

He turned back to the monster and the background had been filled in as he now expected. There was the silver ribbon of roadway under them, and the jewel-like city floating on the luminous air in the distance. And the monster was almost upon them—also as Reeder expected.

There was a lot to be explained yet, but some things were beginning to fall into place. Reeder's brain

clicked with its old rapidity and clarity at last, and he decided that there was no sense in remaining where he was, safe as the monster, actually, might be.

When he had gone through this before, back in that strange sequence in the matter-transmitter on the way to Lagnoupe I from Earth, the girl had been riding the monster and had dismounted to confront Reeder. Now Wilma—the same girl, in the same costume, carrying the same weapon—was at his side, and he turned to confront her. He grasped her, not gently, by the upper arm, and spun her around so that they headed away from the monster. Then, ignoring her protests, dragging her with him, he started to stride away, rapidly but with dignified purpose rather than unseemly fright.

Wilma didn't see it that way. "What's the big idea?" she snapped. "Gone yellow, chum? We'll never get to Millgrim by backing out!"

"To hell with Millgrim!" Reeder snapped right back. "I don't need him—I'm not even sure he's connected with this business. But I do need to get back to Lagnoupe I in a hurry; come on!"

She continued to drag her feet. It shouldn't have held Reeder up at all; he was in good physical trim and she was a mere slip of a girl. But somehow it got harder and harder to make any progress. It was as if the mist through which they waded were turning solid around his ankles, holding him back, dragging him down. He began breathing heavily and his muscles started to ache. The entrance to this setting should be only a slight distance ahead now, but their progress towards it was growing slower and slower.

The sounds of the monster behind them, screaming and stamping in a perfect simulation of frustrated rage, did nothing to add to Reeder's pleasure, although he knew no harm could come from that quarter. Reeder felt

that the monster could hardly be as frustrated as he was getting, with the mist acting more and more like quicksand around him. Cold sweat was standing out on his forehead. He strained harder.

He turned to Wilma, who seemed to be making no effort to struggle along with him. He turned just in time to look into the muzzle of her weapon, which she had raised to aim directly at him. The gun had looked strictly phony before; now it looked deadly.

Wilma pulled the trigger.

There was a crash and blackness descended.



REEDER floated for a while on a sea of sick pain, but when he awoke it was with startling suddenness. He came instantly alert, and felt strangely refreshed. Looking about in bewilderment, he realized that he was again lying on a couch in Cervi's laboratory, and that Cervi himself was standing over him with his usual oily smile. Reeder propped himself on an elbow and smiled back.

The bewilderment didn't last long. He had this part of the puzzle solved, at least. He knew, as he had begun to understand when he recognized the monster and Wilma, that he was not in that lab *again*, he was there *yet*—had been there all the time since he first lay down and allowed himself to be jabbed with a hypodermic needle.

Cervi's smile grew broader. "Congratulations, Mr. Reeder," he said. "You have a very strong mind indeed. No one before you has ever realized that the trip to Lagnoupe II was not real, that our clients simply go to

sleep here and have all the sensations of such a trip hypnotically inserted into their sleeping brains through our tricky little mental broadcaster. Usually, they wake up completely happy, with pleasant memories—for the most part—of their trips. And they never have any reason to suspect otherwise; our machine doesn't even have to touch them to insert its manufactured memory record.

"It's always worked fine, so far. I can't quite understand what went wrong in your case, but apparently, from the feedback recording which we must study constantly as we insert our prepared one, you got some clue to the set-up. I'd like to know what that clue was—how there could possibly be a leak anywhere. Even then, we tried briefly to brazen it out and keep you in the setting until we could make you change your mind somehow, but your determination won out. We must, naturally, allow the subject undergoing treatment to retain some volition of his own, so that his individual tastes will be satisfied by what he thinks he is doing on Lagnoupe II. But your ability to do as you pleased in the setting was quite remarkable—I've never seen anything like it."

Reeder swung to a sitting position. He was wondering how long Cervi would keep up the friendly act. Certainly he couldn't allow a secret like this to walk out with Reeder. On the other hand, he always had to depend on his clients to keep the entire business secret; perhaps Reeder's extraspecial knowledge of its operations need not be so dangerous, at that. Maybe he could make a pretense of wanting to buy his way into the set-up. . .

"I'll be glad to explain what happened," Reeder said, wishing he knew the full explanation himself. Had the wave broadcast by Cervi's machine somehow leaked over and gotten mixed up with the carrier wave of the matter-transmitter? It sounded impossible, and Reeder would have

preferred an explanation that would include some of the other factors, like Lang's odd behavior. But for a while, he'd have to brazen things out.

"Shall we step into my office for a drink?" Cervi suggested, in a manner that was more than simply suggestive.

REEDER agreed amiably. When they were settled again, he brought up the subject he hoped would give him a cover-up. "This little deal must be pretty profitable," he said. "I take it you actually keep all the money the client thinks he's spent on his pleasure trip, as well as your original transportation charge. Very neat."

Cervi nodded. "Yes, it's profitable. We can arrange the memory sequence so that the subject thinks he's spent every last cent he had with him—and they're usually loaded."

A deep-toned bell sounded in Cervi's desk. He pushed a button on the console and looked at Reeder again. "We'll have to change the subject for a while," he said. "Another client has just completed a trip, and he'll expect me to say so long until next time. I'll make it quick though."

A door slid back and a man entered. He looked business-like but happy. "Mr. Millgrim," said Cervi. "Glad to see you again. Hope you had a nice trip. Oh, by the way, I'd like to meet Mr. Reeder."

Reeder rose, but did not advance. He had lost most of his curiosity about Millgrim, figuring there was but slight chance that the businessman was connected with his problems in any way.

He was utterly wrong.

Millgrim advanced to shake Cervi's hand, as Reeder sat down again and disinterestedly sipped his drink. The next thing Reeder knew, Millgrim had flung Cervi over his shoulder. The "insurance-man" landed with a thud, making a battered heap at Reeder's feet.

And Millgrim was suddenly a changed man. "Grab him, sonny!" he spat. "I think he's out, but wallop him a couple to make sure if you have to. But don't kill him; we're going to hold him as a hostage."

Reeder stared, stupefied. Millgrim—the man who had been introduced as Millgrim, anyway; Reeder was beginning to realize that this was not as it had seemed, either—snapped his fingers briskly. "Come on, sonny," he said. "Wake up. 'We've got a lot of work to do, and there's no telling when one of this goon's stooges may happen in. Let's make sure he's out, and get busy.'"

Then, to show Reeder beyond a shadow of a doubt that his latest suspicion was correct, "Millgrim" cackled loudly. It was the cackle of old Obad Lang. Reeder made up his mind fast, and acted. Dashing forward, he grabbed the old man in a grip that pinned his arms tightly to his sides. He was swift but wary, not wanting to end up on the floor next to Cervi.

Lang yelped once.

Reeder felt a slight breeze, and suddenly something was jabbing into his back. A pleasant voice said, "Let go."

REEDER let go, and swung to face his captor. Somewhat numb now, he could not be greatly surprised to discover that it was Wilma, clad as she had been when he had seen her on the "spaceship" couch, and holding a weapon like Gar's. She waved this slightly, smiled coolly, and back Reeder methodically into a corner.

"Now, take it easy, sonny," Lang said. "Don't get sore just because you've been fooled a few times—by my phony beard among other things. You haven't been much help so far, you know, but when we explain the whole thing maybe you'll feel more like playing along. Oh, by the way—you've met my daughter, Wilma, I take it?"

Rage got the best of Reeder, and he trembled slightly. "You're not going to get away with this," he snarled. "I can see now that you're behind the weapons that have been appearing here illegally, and probably a lot of other contraband material as well. I don't know what you're up to at the moment, but it's probably just as crooked—and I'm going to see that you answer for all of it."

Lang ignored him and proceeded to rip Cervi's desk apart. He came up with a mass of wiring from the complexity of electrical gadgets the desk had contained and trussed Cervi up tightly. Reeder watched this operation without knowing quite what to do about it. Wilma's weapon didn't waver.

Then Lang poured two fresh drinks and replenished Reeder's glass as well. He sat down, and motioned for Reeder to do the same. Wilma took a seat well to one side, where Reeder couldn't possibly reach her. When Lang spoke again, his voice had suddenly become deliberate, purposeful, and compelling. Reeder began to think that he was seeing the real Lang for the first time in the whole fantastic affair.

"Reeder," the old man said, "if you want to accuse me of being a traitor to Earth and the empire, I admit the truth of the charge; I *am* a traitor. In most cases, I think you'd be justified in arresting me and taking me in for punishment. I just happen to think that this is a special case—a case where the application of Earth's usual policy would be horribly wrong and injurious. That argument is my only defense."

He leaned back, looking very thoughtful. "I admit I've made mistakes, Reeder. Trying to furnish the population of this planet with weapons for an uprising was probably one of them. Wilma and I had lots of arguments on that point, and she was right, it seems.

"You noticed the discrepancies be-

tween what you've heard of this planet and what you saw, eh? That's because when you think of 'complete' tyranny, you think of efficient secret police—and the police here aren't anything like that. But they're bright enough to handle the revolutionists, who pop up, in small groups. You see, most of the people on this world don't realize they're living under hellish conditions; Coster is one of the most complete tyrants the universe has ever known, and his tyranny is self-protecting and self-perpetuating. Besides, there was too much chance of these little hand weapons getting into the possession of really vicious criminals.

"I've felt a higher loyalty than the one that I feel towards Earth, Reeder. I feel responsible for removing Coster, a blight on civilization who will hold this planet in check, keep it from developing and progressing normally, forever. I'm willing to use any weapon I can find, but I've finally found the right one.

"**W**HEN I held you up in the matter-transmitter and fed you a manufactured scene that was apparently realistic in every detail, I was giving my idea its first test. The scene itself came from here; I had developed a means of tapping Cervi's tight-beamed mental rays and re-broadcasting them. That first time, I re-broadcast them on another tight beam, directly to you, since you were such a beautifully handy subject. But my machine has several improvements over Cervi's; I can use it to blanket the whole planet with broadcasts—and that's what I'm going to do when I start feeding my own scenes into it. The one person on the planet who might figure out what was going on when that happens, though, is Cervi—so it's necessary to remove him. I'm hoping to get him to cooperate, eventually, but I have to set things moving my way first or he'll never agree. I want you to cooperate, too, but I can get along without you, if I have to.

It'll mean putting you out of the way though, obviously."

Reeder's brain was racing. "But just a minute," he broke in. "Wilma here was in the scene you broadcast to me in the transmitter. How could that be, when she wasn't here and nothing like the scene occurred until just now? How..."

"Good question," Lang admitted. "It happens Wilma has been my spy in Cervi's camp for some time, now—her own idea, incidentally. She's been one of his models for the dream sequences Cervi worked up to make people think they were actually on Lagnoupe II. You don't find many girls as pretty as her on *this* planet, let me tell you. She wasn't really there in the spaceship scene at all—in the sense that you and I were. You and I were the only ones actually taking the trip, but Wilma got him to project a sequence with her in it for your benefit, in the hope that you'd begin to figure things out, and choose the right side."

He paused, while Reeder thought some more. The time was welcome; Reeder was a very confused man. He was not at all sure he was the same man he had been when he'd received the draft notice that had thrust him into all this. But a definite decision danced tantalizingly away from him.

Lang spoke once more. "In the old days on Earth," he said, "there used to be talk of captive audiences—groups of people who couldn't escape from a particular presentation of an advertising message. Coster has created an almost perfect captive audience out of this planet's entire population—those ad-bubbles of his, for instance. Cervi created a captive audience of a slightly different kind. Both of these gadgets are pretty miraculous in their workings—and in modern fighting, you have to take your weapons from wherever you can; modern technology is too specialized for the situation to be otherwise. Nobody but Earth has developed a matter-transmitter; nobody

but Cervi has developed a gadget exactly like this one—in spite of all your psychoscanning and Coster's push-button people.

"So I'm just going to take Coster's captive audience and push it one step further—drum into it how completely captive it is until it either goes collectively nuts or rises up and bursts its bonds!"

THE DECISION was coming. Reeder knew now what it would have to be—but still he hesitated. Lang was such a completely new type to him, so oddly different from any personality he'd encountered in years of psychoscanning...

"So you plan to feed the populace propaganda designed to make them all want to overthrow Coster, their ruler," Reeder said coldly. "What makes you think he wouldn't be replaced naturally in time by someone more progressive? What gives you the right to interfere? Or—*do you want to be ruler of this planet yourself?*"

Lang smiled sadly. "I wouldn't call it propaganda, exactly, but I suppose you could say that. All I'm going to do is show them, in every dream every night, what life could be like if Coster let progress be made, didn't take food out of their mouths and clothes off their backs—if he didn't keep the whole planet so highly regimented. Standardization, here, rather than concentration camps and spies, is the keynote—but the average I. Q. of the planet is high. They'll realize what is happening in short order, and figure out what to do about it. They'll replace Coster with someone better.

"Not with me, Reeder; not with me. I don't want or deserve the honor. I'm going to have to prove this to you, too, but for now I'll ask you to accept it. In a way, I'm responsible for the situation here, and by helping change it I'll only be paying an honest debt. When that's done, I'll be happy, and I'll leave this place in peace.

"The first peace, Reeder, that I've

known in a couple of hundred years."

Reeder was startled, and knew he looked it. But somehow, he believed Lang. There was nothing else he could do; he couldn't help but believe now that the old man was telling the truth. Reeder accepted the story, and Lang, completely.

"Yes, I'm something of an immortal—not absolutely so, but a reasonable facsimile," Lang said. "That discovery is one I made myself, centuries ago. I shared it with only two other people, not daring to make the secret public until I saw how it worked out for us. As it turned out, I went too far in sharing it—though it was an understandable error, I'm sure."

He paused. Reeder turned to look at Wilma; the girl had put the weapon away and was smiling at him, a warm and beautiful smile that held a lot of promise. Reeder returned the smile, and forced himself only with difficulty to give Lang his attention again.

"That's right," Lang went on. "Wilma, my daughter, was one of the other two. The second was Coster, who helped me with my experiments at the time. You see, I was a native of Lagnoupe I, originally. I fled taking Wilma with me, after years of hiding out from Coster, who had immediately started his march to power. We left when the first starships from Earth passed through, and made our way by intricate stages to Earth, where we set about the task of appearing to be citizens. But as soon as we could, we returned here.

"For Coster was my big mistake; he can't be replaced as long as he lives—his powers are too great. And, for the people of this world, he will live forever."

It was clear to Reeder now that the fire in Lang's eyes was one of dedication, and he wondered why he had not seen this before.

"Unless I can make the whole plan-

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Readin' and Writhin'

HEAP LITTLE MEDICINE

Space Medicine. Edited by John P. Margbarger. 83 pp. The University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill. s2 paper, s3 cloth.

THE SUB-TITLE of this book—"The Human Factor in Flights Beyond the Earth"—indicates the volume should be of interest to all readers and writers of science-fiction. Some of the write-ups on it have stressed this, virtually indicating that it will open up new vistas to all of us. I wish it were true!

Unfortunately, for people interested in science-fiction, all the new knowledge and science will be found on the second hundred pages of this 83-page book.

Physically, it's a nicely done little book. The two-color dust jacket and the impressive title pages are attractive; the paper is slick, and the wide margins give an unusual amount of white space. The printing is superb. The general make-up is marred only by the trick of counting even the half-title page, title pages, etc., to get the rather unimpressive total of 83. Since nobody in his right mind would buy this book by the number of pages, anyhow, the trick seems singularly pointless. Actually, there are approximately fifty pages of text, plus a number of fairly-interesting pictures and diagrams.

In those fifty pages, the general conclusions are reached that: man will probably get out into space; there may be some low-level life on Mars; and space flight will involve some unusual but not-too-well-understood difficulties for people, some perhaps dangerous.

None of this should be very surprising. This was never intended to be a book for the layman or anyone else, in the first place; it is simply a collection of speeches from a symposium held at Chicago in

March, 1950. The men delivering the speeches were speculatively outlining the problems before them and where they would go from there, rather than trying to outline any new discoveries. Having attended conferences where half a dozen people got up and talked on a subject, I know it was probably an interesting symposium—particularly with the discussions which must have followed the lectures. But to put such material in a book is seldom a worthy idea—especially where the reader can't join in the discussions which still should follow the lectures!

Essentially, the preface and foreword tell us how the book came about. Then Major General Harry G. Armstrong introduces us to the subject by a discussion of the early days of Aviation Medicine. In all this, we're still following the warm-up practice of a convention of speakers, but it looks rather pointless in a book. Finally, by page 14, we begin to get into the subject.

Wernher von Braun traces the basic facts on rockets, quickly. He establishes that rockets will work outside the atmosphere, that liquid fuel is better than powder; he gives the basic theory of the three-stage rocket, and how it can achieve a satellite-orbit and land in a braking-orbit. He then touches on the elementary uses of a satellite station. There is nothing wrong with this—but nothing which cannot be found in more detail in the recent article in *Colliers*, or in any other book on the subject. There simply isn't space enough for him to do more than give the bare, basic facts. He states: "I shall dispense with a mathematical proof of all these claims..." In fact, he has been forced to dispense with all proof and most of the background of theory. He finally concludes that "the time has arrived for medical investigation of the problems of manned rocket flight."

HUBERTUS STRUGHOLD then discusses life outside the Earth. This is not a discussion of the possibility of men living on other planets or in space—as the title of the book might make us believe—but the normal arguments about life on other planets. The article is lucid, and figures are given for all his points—though there must remain some question as to how exact we really can be about Mars' atmospheric-pressure, etc. Unfortunately, space again permits little more than a skeletal discussion of the question of temperature and oxygen. Mars, and possibly Venus, are the only planets other than Earth which possess a temperature consistent with life as we know it. And even Mars can only safely be said to have vegetation—probably like the lichens. The discussion of lichens is brief enough to be an encyclopedia entry, but quite well done. I'd have liked to see a much more thorough attack on the problem by the writer, since it was the most interestingly-done of the articles in the book, in spite of the general familiarity of the subject.

I should also have liked to see some discussion of just how suitable the planets could be made for human survival—and what possible medical problems would be encountered.

Heinz Haber discusses "Astronomy and Space Medicine", the first article which deals at all with the subject of the book. In this, he deals quickly with the problem of lack of gravity, which he feels might not be downright dangerous. Then follows a discussion of the carbon-cycle of the sun, and the sun's radiation—including the ultra-violet and x-ray dangers, as well as the question of charged particles to be found in space. There is very little in the article on what effect all these might have on the men inside a space-ship, or the problems of a medical nature which might arise from a trip through space. In fact, more time is devoted to establishing the functions of astronomy and astrophysics than to dealing with what those will mean to space-travellers.

Colonel Paul A. Campbell covers "Orientation in Space." This is another article which does, at least, deal directly with problems which might face men in space. However, countless tales in science fiction have covered the same ground, and it will come as nothing spectacular or new to any informed reader. Campbell admits at the start that most opinions as to conditions must be based on extrapolation from what examples we can find of roughly-similar conditions here. He dismisses the problem of orienting the ship as simple (which may well be true when near Earth, but which might be a problem eventually, nonetheless). His interest is in whether men inside the ship can orient themselves well enough, without gravity to control the ship. At present, men achieve their normal orientation through their eyes, their kinesthetic sense, and their vestibular—or "balance"—sense, located in the inner ear.

Both of the last two are dependent on gravity.

The question, then, is whether men can achieve a sense of orientation with only visual guides. This is left as a question, though there seems to be some hope. Col. Campbell suggests that a study should be made, using deaf mutes without any normal function of the labyrinth of the inner ear "balance" organs, placing them in water to disorient them from the gravity pull that still affects their kinesthetic senses. From the suggestion, one gathers that little real experimentation on the subject has been done.

Finally, Konrad Buettner discusses "Bioclimatology of Manned Rocket Flight." Some of this repeats what was already discussed by Heinz Haber on radiation in space. The problem of heat and cold in the ship is covered, with the usual difference between a polished nickel surface and a blackened surface. The problem is one of getting rid of excess heat, of course, rather than maintaining enough warmth. There is then some discussion of the lack of convection-currents, when free from gravity, with the suggestion of the need of artificial ventilation. This is hardly a problem, since cheap fans have been in use for years, and even a small fan should serve the purpose.

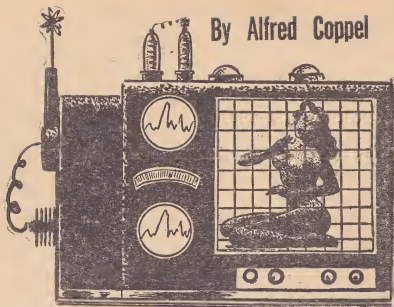
A brief section of the article covers the question of the suitability of canned air. There is no detailed mention of the experiences of divers, etc. But we gather that, probably, it will prove suitable. Singularly, there is absolutely no mention of the feasibility of using plants to produce oxygen from the exhaled carbon-dioxide. The "ecology" of a space-ship has been pretty well established in science-fiction, but it still seems to be a rather primitive thing as discussed here.

IN FACT, this whole article, together with several of the others, makes one feel that it might have been better for the men giving these lectures to read science-fiction carefully, than for science-fiction enthusiasts to hope to find new material here! The few figures given are more exact than those to be found in most stories; but apparently, much that has been worked out by the fictioneers has still to be covered by the men working seriously on the problem. Just as the first stories used huge tanks of oxygen and some absorber for carbon-dioxide, so this article uses them—suggesting silica gel as a possibility for absorbing the wastes of breathing.

There is a two-and-a-half page appendix. At first glance, this might be thought to be an appendix to the book. Actually, it applies only to the last article. It shows mathematically the means of calculating the temperature of bodies in space under varying conditions.

In conclusion, my general feeling is that the book has very little to do with space medicine. Most of it is material long-since

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Defender of the Faith

Jere dreamed of a man of her own, a good-looking man — not one of these fat breeders — but she had to remember her mission, first of all!



THE TEACHER'S voice droned on and on in the stuffy room. Jere, weary from a six-hour patrol, could scarcely stay awake. Her head bobbed, and Ella jabbed an elbow into her ribs. "Keep your eyes

open," she whispered.

Jere straightened with an effort, squaring her shoulders. A world of fatigue seemed to be pressing down on her, and she had the rebellious thought that patrolling wasn't fit work for a woman. Ella was looking disapprovingly at her, lips com-

pressed. Jere squirmed uncomfortably, more conscious of the hard stool and the glaring flurotubes, than of the teacher's endless repetitions.

—at least, Jere thought, *she might try and make it interesting.*

The teacher, wearing major's leaves on her blouse, was grinding out the same line, the one that never changed. If Jere had heard it once, she had heard it a million times.

—all right, she thought sulkily, *I believe it. It's all true. So what?*

The major was saying that San Francisco was entitled to free access to natural resources: oil, fissionables, men—and that was the reason for the war. It seemed to Jere that the Three-Cornered War had been going

on ever since she could remember. When it wasn't against Los Angeles and Denver, it was Phoenix or Reno. Always someone. There simply wasn't enough of anything to go around—particularly men.

At 2100 hours, the class ended and the Scouts filed out of the classroom stiffly, aching from the two-hour ordeal on the uncommonly-uncomfortable stools.

From the window of the small room she shared with Ella and two other girls of her section, Jere could see the bomb-shattered city spread out below. To the north were twisted towers that the older women claimed once supported a bridge across the narrow mouth of the bay; in the west, the ruins of what had once been Oakland glowed with an eerie radioactive light. A full moon rode high in the sky.

"Bomber's moon," Ella said uneasily.

"Denver has no planes," Jere replied, slipping off her uniform blouse.

"They have missiles," Ella declared, "while you were out a dud landed in the bay." She sniffed scornfully. "Interception was terrible."

"Interception generally is."

Jere lay gratefully on her hard pallet and closed her eyes. But Ella stood at the window, contemplating the moonlight. "Jere," she said. "Did you hear about the men?"

Jere opened her eyes. "Which men?"

"The ones Captain Belle's section captured yesterday."

"How many?"

"Twenty, I think."

Jere whistled softly. "Denvers?"

"No. Angelenos."

"That should bring reprisals, all right; those L.A. witches won't take it lying down. She pursed her lips, staring at the roof. "Where are they now?"

Ella shrugged. "In the breeder-pens." She gave a short, bitter laugh "we won't get any."

"Men aren't for the Fighting Sections, Ella," Jere said gently.

"Why aren't they?" Ella demanded. "We do all the work, take all the risks."

"The men are for the Mother Sections, Ella," Jere said. "It's always been that way." And then, because she could see that Ella was unsatisfied with her answer, she added: "Pen-men are no good anyway. You've seen them. Fat and white. Ugly, I'd say."

Ella sat down on the bed and kicked off her flight-boots. "What would you know about it?"

"Nothing," Jere admitted. "But I know some Mother Section people who've seen wild ones; they say they're much handsomer."

"Savages," Ella said.

"Maybe." Jere stretched and closed her eyes again. Once, she had had a series of dreams about a world where there was a man for each woman. A strange sort of place without ruins or missiles or Three-Cornered War. It had been pleasant to dream like that, but she'd told someone and Psycho Section had taken her in hand and explained the dreams away. It was always dangerous, they told her to dream like that; such ideas, even in sleep, endangered the Matriarchy itself. For three months she had gone to sleep with a somnoteacher whispering in her ears. The dreams never came back, though she thought of them often.

THE UNDULATING wail of the attack alarm interrupted her reverie. A harsh voice crackled from the wall-speaker.

"Radarplot has picked up jetcraft fifty miles south of the city. All Interception Section pilots man their craft. All Scout Section pilots stand by to assist. Mother Sections to shelter."

"So Denver has no planes," Ella said breathlessly, pulling on her boots.

"Angelinas, dear," Jere said get-

ting to her feet. "Probably Beesix-fours. Damn them anyway."

In the far distance, flakguns had begun their usual futile hacking at the sky. The whine of jets warming and milling about on the flightdecks filled the city.

Ella and Jere ran down the corridors, crowded with women, toward the hangardeck. From the Mother Section areas, a great squalling and shrieking filled the building with noise; far under the ground, the men were being herded into steel and concrete vaults for safe-keeping.

On the hangardeck, there was some measure of order; interceptors were being trundled out onto the flight-deck, and a few missiles were being loaded into the catapult-launchers. The two-place scoutcraft were being refueled and their guns armed.

Jere found her own ship near the end of the line. Her radar-operator, a thin-face girl with stringy hair leaking out from under her helmet, was standing by.

"Are we fueled, May?" Jere asked struggling into her flight-gear. "haven't fixed the tail-gun," May said unhappily. "Is it Angelinas, Miss Jere? Oh, Mother! I was afraid it would be them ever since I heard about the men; those Angelinas really fight, they do."

"We'll do all right, May," Jere said, with an assurance she didn't feel, thinking of the multiple pom-pom guns on the Beesixfours. "Those jetcraft are old as the hills."

May cast a doubting eye at the scarred flank of their own machine. "So's ours," she said sourly.

The steady crumping noise of the flakguns ceased as the first flights of interceptors took the air. The silence was thick; then the thin, whistling noise of the Beesixfours filtered down onto the waiting city. Jere estimated there were at least ten of them.

"Why're we always fighting, Miss Jere?" May demanded suddenly.

"Bombing and stealing and fighting all the time—"

"May!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Jere," May said. "I didn't mean to talk like that. I'm nervous, I guess—"

"All right," Jere said. "We both know better than to ask questions like that. Thank God, there wasn't anybody from Guard Section to hear you or I'd be riding without radar tonight. Let's forget it."

"Thanks, miss," May said.

"*Scout Section craft stand by to support interception!*" the words of the Fighter Controller came through the wall speakers, cutting through the clangor of the hangar deck.

"Interception flubbed it again," May said bitterly.

As though to accent her words there was a thunderous roar in the distance.

"Hit in the bay," Jere said. In her mind she could see the mounting column of glowing water. "I wonder how many got it along the water-front?" Tomorrow, and for weeks, there would be radioactive mist in the air; people would die slowly, retching, with their hair falling out in clumps. "Damn them, damn them!"

"*Blue Scout Section scramble!*" the speaker shrieked.

—this is a bad one, Jere thought. *A maximum effort.* The Angelinas were really seething tonight.

"We'll be next, May," Jere said. "we can't wait for the gun. Get aboard."

SITTING in the vibrating jet, Jere could see Ella's blue-winged craft moving into takeoff position. There was a flicker of blue fire from the nozzle and the flutter of a white scarf as Ella waved. Then she was gone, streaking up into the night.

High overhead a fission-bomb flared, white-hot. From seventy thousand feet, it etched the city in light, blotting out the moon.

Jere wondered how many plutonium bombs the attackers were car-

rying. There had been a great deal of talk about a new thorium-reactor in Los Angeles, and a growing stockpile of bombs. She had taken pictures of the supposed installation herself, not less than a month before, from a hundred thousand feet.

Her practiced eyes flicked over the battered dials on the panel. The turbine was vibrating terribly, but there wasn't a machine shop in San Francisco capable of repairing it to original specifications, and the motor itself was nearly a hundred years old. It dated from the era before the Three-Cornered War—a time when there were still men who could fly and work and fight. Though they did not fight other cities, then, Jere wondered briefly if such a time had ever really been at all. History said that the Matriarchy had always existed; but legend claimed that once there were as many men as women and that they had been the rulers. The thought was incomprehensible.

—those fat, white, breeders?

Yet, the old women claimed it was so, and they said that wars had decimated the male population—until now there were so few that women had to fight for them.

—breed, or die. The slogan. The cause.

—we fight, all right, Jere thought bitterly, we fight for a handful of men, of whom perhaps seventy-percent are sterile and have to be destroyed. We fight for a puddle of uncontaminated water. A pile of hard coal. A half-ruined factory or a barren field.

"Red Flight scramble!"

The command drove the rebellious thoughts from her mind and she rolled the jet forward, toward the gaping dark mouth of the hangar. Her lips moved very silently as she repeated to herself the short prayer she had used before battle since girlhood.

Great Mother God protect your servant Jere, a Fighter for the Right

and a Defender of the Faith. Give me victory and give my city fertility and safety and unmarked young—

AS SHE EMERGED onto the flightdeck, Jere could see a large section of the wooden structures along the waterfront burning, ignited by the flash of the bomb in the bay. She cursed the Angelinas through set lips, and lined her jetcraft up with the runway, throttling the uneven engine with a practiced hand.

"Ready, May?" she asked into the intercom.

The girl's reply came back muffled. "Ready, miss. I wish we had the gun, though; I really do."

"Don't worry about it now," Jere snapped. "Does the radar work?"

"I got a blip, miss," May said.

The Red Flight leader was vanishing down the deck, spitting sparks from her half-tuned engine. Jere saw her ship vanish below the level of the runway and dip into the deep canyon between buildings; she held her breath until she saw the glowing nozzle of the jetcraft clear and climbing steeply.

Jere ran the throttle forward, and the scout picked up speed with a sickening rush. The dim blue lights at the end of the runway hurtled under the sharply sweptback wings and they were airborne, banking low over the burning waterfront and swinging out over the still churning waters of the bay.

The geig began to chatter as they skirted the radioactive cloud and cut back, spiralling upward in an ever tightening, ever steepening climb.

"Clear contact," May reported. "They're at seventy thousand feet, course 245 degrees. Probably making another bomb run."

—exactly what they're doing, Jere thought. And they wouldn't waste another fission bomb on the bay. Target would be the breeding pens and the vaults. What they couldn't keep, they'd destroy if they could.

A streak of fire raced down from the sky, falling like a stone. An interceptor shot down. Jere felt the old familiar stirring of the blood, the thrill of battle. She had the feeling of wishing her fingers had claws and that they might be tearing into the flesh of the women in the nightriding bombers.

—this world, she thought, this bleak world. It's a way of life. MY way of life. Maybe things were better once, maybe life was like those erotic dreams, but this is the way it is NOW and that's what counts. Women should FIGHT...

"Change course to 019," May said.

Jere swung the jet around, still climbing. The moonlight was taking on the peculiar crystal brilliance of high flight. The altimeter needle touched 50,000 feet. Outside, on the frames of the pressurized plexiglas, rime ice was forming.

"Change to 024," May said through the intercom "Four bogies."

Jere banked the jet until the gyro held steady on the new course. "Anything from IFF?"

"Nothing, Miss Jere," said May's metallic voice in her helmetphones. "We might just as well be all alone up here."

From the moonlit darkness beneath them, a trio of rocket-trails came streaking up and past. Five thousand feet above them, there was a fiery blast as one missile found a bomber and disintegrated it.

"Oh, Mother," May said; "they actually hit something."

"That'll shake them up," Jere said with satisfaction.

Pieces of the burning bomber rained down around them, and Jere zigzagged the jet skillfully to avoid them.

"We're up with them, miss," May reported. "You can pick them up on your screen now—if you can get it working."

THE TINY radarscreen in Jere's panel flicked on and the bomb-

ers were there, three of them now, etched in a greenish light. Jere centered them on the grid and armed the wing-rockets.

"Closing," Jere reported.

"I'll be on the guns," May said.

The altimeter-needle hovered near 70,000 feet. The night sky was black as pitch, and the stars and moon glittered like bits of jewel. Ahead, Jere could catch the glint of metal planks and the soft bluish glow of the Beesixfours' jets.

Far below, there was a sudden fireball and a rising mushroom of flame; the bombers swung about sharply to the south.

"That was a bad one, miss," May whispered in a choked voice. "Oh, that was really a bad one."

—damn them damn them, Jere thought. We try to live and they come up with their bombers and their raiding—

She forgot entirely about the breeders in the vaults that had caused the raid. She thought only of her city, shuddering under the impact of bombs, and the heavy, cowering women of the Mother Sections huddling in the dark shelters. Under her face-mask, her lips pulled back in a savage grimace of hate. She triggered the first flight of rockets and they swept out of the wing tubes in a shower of reddish fire.

"Missed! Damn!"

She closed further on the fleeing bombers, arming the next flight of missiles. There were flashes of fire up ahead, and the arching trail of incendiary bullets streaking past at unbelievable speeds. The pompom guns on the bombers were blazing at the pursuing jet.

May had swung the turret around, forgetting about the useless tailguns and was firing over Jere's head at the dark shapes ahead. The jet was filled with the stench of cordite. It vibrated to the heavy thudding of the twin 20 millimeter guns.

Jere caught the last bomber in the line ahead and centered it in the ra-

darscope. The rockets flashed out and the Beesixfour erupted in a gout of oily flame. Jere's scout flashed through the fire and on toward the next raider.

"Parasite fighter, miss!" May shouted.

A tiny jet had left the parent bomber and was somewhere behind them. Jere's mouth went dry; she pulled the scout around in a tight turn. The wingtips stalled and she lost speed and altitude correcting. Streaks of red whipped past the plexiglas of her cockpit. The parasite was closing in from behind and she couldn't shake free.

She felt suddenly very tired, her movements of the controls were leaden, fatigued. She heard the crash of metal tearing and a high pitched whine of pressure escaping from the cockpit.

"Miss! Help me, Jere—I'm hit!"

"May!"

No reply. Jere shoved the nose down into a streaking dive. The parasite followed. A stream of explosive shells found the wingtips, moved in. The scout buffeted erratically, and in its agony whipped over into a bone-wrenching spin. Jere heard herself praying—

—great Mother God protect your servant Jere a Fighter for the Right and a Defender of the Faith—

The cockpit was full of smoke and flame, and still the parasite followed, blazing away.

"May, jump!"

There was no reply. Jere twisted around to look back; there was dark blood on the transparent canopy.

She pulled back the shell and stood up. A million wind-devils snatched at her and then she was falling free, through star-shot darkness and freezing cold. With the last of her strength, she pulled the ripcord and the ribbonchute streamed out of its pack. There was a jarring impact as it opened, and then nothing....

JERE OPENED her eyes in bright sunlight. There was deep grass under her. For a time, she didn't know what it was—for she had never been outside the city except by air, and there was almost no vegetation at all in the irradiated ground of San Francisco.

A man squatted by her side. A man unlike any Jere had ever seen.

She thought—*a wild one.*

He was burned dark from the sun, and he was dressed in a skirt of animal skins and little else. His face was bearded and across his bare shoulders hung a rifle of archaic design.

"We heard the fight last night," he said.

Jere said nothing. Her hands grasped her own weapons, and found them untouched.

"You women are really making a mess of things, you know," he said.

"Where am I?" Jere said, ignoring his insolence.

"Near Saratoga?"

"What's Saratoga?"

"It used to be a town." He shifted easily on his haunches, with an animal's lithe movements.

"How far from the city?"

He grinned, showing sharp white teeth through the dark bush of his beard. "What city?"

"San Francisco, of course," Jere said indignantly. "Did you take me for an Angelina?"

"You all look alike," he said; "you all look alike to me."

Jere ignored the insult and said: "How far from San Francisco?"

"Sixty miles, maybe; depends on how you go."

"I must get back."

"Yes? Why?"

Jere sat up, and unhooked her chute-harness. What would this stupid savage know about the need for fighters to protect the Matriarchy? It would be useless to explain.

"You can't get back," he said fi-

nally. "The guard-robots wouldn't let you through; they never let anyone through."

Jere thought about that. It was true that she had never been out of the city on the ground. And it was also true the guards never let anyone approach any city. How else could a city be protected? No Fighting Section woman lost outside the city had ever returned.

"You wise girls have fixed things good," the man said, grinning. "You've cut the cities off from any possible contact with the people who live in between the cities. And with all the fighting you do, no one ever gets a chance to change things. You fight mostly over men, don't you?" There was a peculiarly suggestive and irritating inflection in his voice.

Jere felt an impulse to put him in his place. "Men," she said stiffly. "Not wild animals."

The man picked a straw of green grass and thrust it between his lips. "You may have something there," he said. "But it seems to me you're missing a bet. There are men about, even if they are a bit on the wild side. They'd sort of like to get things started again—" He looked at her appraisingly.

Jere quite suddenly remembered all the lectures, the reiterated statements, the history she had learned—

—after male domination had almost wrecked the world, the women established the Matriarchy for the survival of the race. Men are wicked, quarrelsome, dirty, untrustworthy and savage. Only a few picked specimens can be tolerated, and those only by the self-sacrificing women of the Mother Sections who subject themselves to them as an act of Faith so that the race might survive—

"Like the old days," Jere said scornfully.

"The old days weren't so bad, I hear tell," the man said. "I know men didn't do such a good job of running the world, but you women haven't even done as well."

"We're surviving," Jere said positively. "And that's what counts?"

"So are we," the man said. "And our women aren't filled up with all those goofball things they teach you city women; they tell you that men are no good—mainly because there aren't enough of them to go around."

JERE GOT to her feet. "I don't have to listen to this," she said. The man stood beside her. "Oh, but you do."

Jere stared at him.

"Because, you see, you belong to me now. I found you."

"Are you mad?"

"I must be," he said showing those white teeth, "even to think of taking on another city woman. You fighters are all devils to get along with, but I've done it before and I guess I can do it again."

"Another city woman?" Jere was too stunned to say more.

"Sure. I got three wives; you'll be the fourth. Two of them are from Phoenix; they were shot down in a raid on Frisco—I found them and patched them up. They were hard to get on with for a while, but they learned. Life isn't so bad out here you know; we get along. And some day, there will be enough of us men to go back to the cities and make all you crazy females quit bombing each other all to hell."

"Great Mother!" Jere backed away from him and reached for her pistol. He moved so swiftly she hardly knew what struck her. There was a stinging pain across her face and the pistol was flying through the air. He stopped, picked it up and shoved it into his waistband.

"Now come along, like a good girl," he said.

HIS CAMP was two days' hike from where he found her; since she was unused to making her way on foot through the woods, he made a con-

cession to her and they stopped for the night by a small stream.

The water, to her surprise, was uncontaminated. She watched while he stripped and bathed—always with his weapons near at hand.

He shot a brace of small birds—of a kind unknown to Jere, who knew only the ugly mutated seagulls that infested the city—and they made a meal of them as the sun sank below the western hills.

"You're being a good girl," he said approvingly, watching her "there's no use fighting the inevitable. You'll like it once you get used to living away from the city. No crazy dames in bombers trying to atomize you; no uniforms and saluting and acting like a bunch of tin soldiers. Plenty to eat out here."

"Why don't the men come back to the cities?" Jere asked, thinking of the strength it would give San Francisco to have a real surplus of males.

"Why, first off, there's the guard-robots. But I suppose they could be gotten around some way. Mainly it's because there aren't enough of us yet; we wouldn't take kindly to being a natural resource. And a lot of us here are sterile from the radiation, too. You know they'd never keep a sterile man alive in the city. Breed or die; isn't that what they teach you in the towns?"

"Yes, it is."

"Now look." He bent over and drew a map in the dirt. The lines were clear and etched in the firelight. "Here's where we're going. See?" He named the confluence of two streams that Jere knew well from the air. "That's our camp. There are maybe a hundred and fifty men there, with their wives. About three hundred and sixty people in all; well-hidden. We're going to make that into a town one day, and then we won't have to hide from city raiders. When that's done, we'll make other towns; together, all of us will fix it so's we can get back into the cities and stop

all this foolishness about women blowing themselves up over a few males. Oh, things'll be fine then; they really will. Maybe you'll live to see it. Your children will, and that's sure."

—a hundred and fifty men! A wealth of males. If San Francisco had those for itself—

Jere said: "It's a fine dream."

"You bet it is. Oh, people have bugged up the world—but time will come when things are good again."

—a hundred and fifty men!

Jere looked at the lines etched in the dirt. So many times she had flown over that spot, never knowing.

The night grew dark in the forest, and the fire died to a bed of embers. The man slipped an arm over Jere's shoulders. "You see? Isn't this better?"

"Of course."

—a hundred and fifty!

"You'll be all right."

"I'll be all right."

For the first time in her life, Jere was kissed.

The fire died.

Jere lay open-eyed beside the man, listening to his heavy, regular breathing. The stars, through the intertwining branches of the trees, seemed closer then they ever had through the thick plastic of a jetcraft.

She twisted on her side to look at him. His bare chest, black in the darkness, rose and fell evenly. He slept heavily, confidently.

Jere remembered the bombers in the night and May dying trapped in a metal shell nine miles in the sky. The red blossoming of a bomb gutting a city and the lingering radiance of the deep craters where nothing lived. The bare rooms of the Fighting Sections where unsexed women lived out barren, hungry lives with nothing to assuage their pangs but the cold fury of battle with their sisters.

The fat, white men in the pens, weak and soft to the touch, and the heavyfooted women of the Mother Sections praying for undeformed infants, while the night outside wailed and shrieked with attack alarms.

—great Mother God protect Jere a Defender of the Faith—

—things could be different.

Jere rolled away from the sleeping man and sat up, thinking.

—a hundred and fifty men. If San Francisco had those men—

—breed or die.

She covered herself against the cold and got to her knees, reaching. It was there, glinting in the early morning moonlight. Her hand touched cold metal, squeezed it.

She remembered the map scratched into the dirt with a stick. One hundred and fifty men, all healthy; a wealth of men.

She stood up, a small, taut figure in the darkness. The man stirred,

opened his eyes. They were wide, looking up at her out of a face in shadows.

"Jere—" he said.

She squeezed the trigger and a flat crack died into silence through the glades. The man stiffened—

"Jere—"

She fired again.

Dawn was breaking as she gathered her gear and began walking north, toward the city. The man had told her that the guard robots could be passed—some way. She'd find the way. And in her mind she carried a map—a map that could lead a raiding party to a spot where a camp lay hidden near the confluence of two streams. A camp with one hundred and fifty healthy males for the breeding pens of San Francisco.

She walked swiftly, head high, trying not to remember the long night. For after all, men were such fools—and she was a Defender of the Faith.



Was he an Emancipator—or the worst Tyrant of all Time?



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DYNAMIC SCIENCE FICTION

THE PROWLER

Complete Novelet by William C. Bailey

Whitney's talk about a mysterious "proowler" sounded like stage-setting to Condon—until he actually saw a strange figure appear suddenly. Then the plan came to him, and he wondered if it had all been "predestined".

HARRY CONDON was a man with an idea; it was his poor luck to team up with Bart

Whitney, a man who had two ideas.

Condon's idea was that a system of eight equations he had developed described the fields of force required to produce "time-travel". Whitney's first idea was that he could build the generators for those fields; his second idea was to keep it all for himself.

At first, Condon considered his equations nothing more than a mathematical curiosity. But when he described them to Whitney—the closest thing to a friend he had on the faculty—the physicist had seen at once that generators could be built to produce the fields the equations described. Between them, in a concrete block addition they threw up behind Whitney's old Victorian house on Danbury Hill, they were able to build the generators.

Condon's equations had described eight force-fields. Mathematical exploration hinted that the exact manner of their combination was one important factor in producing "time-travel." There are a great many ways to combine eight different things; knowing no other way, they decided to try every one of the possible permutations. A prepunched tape, fed into a selector, provided an automatic means of trying every conceivable combination; at the impulse of the punched tape, the selector set up one combination after another. Power was thrown to the generators, briefly,

and the tape then advanced a notch to permit trial of the next combination.

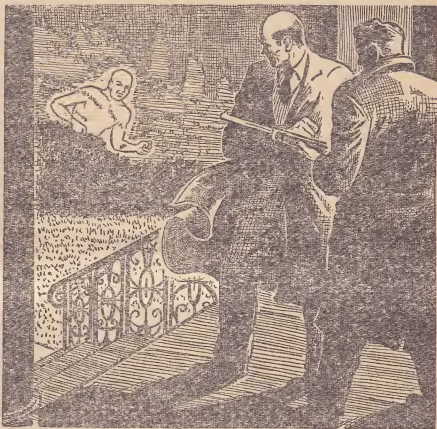
Whitney placed several samples in the focus of the generators. The theory was that certain combinations of the force-fields might accept one class of matter and not others. The samples rested on simple spring-balances, triggered to alarm-bells. In that way, they planned to run the generators day and night. The first time one of the samples was displaced in "time", the spring-scale would rise, in response to departure of its weight, and trigger the alarm.

Whitney had picked a small cylinder of chemically-pure copper, a large crystal of copper sulfate, a block of some hardwood, a fern in a pot and a hamster in a cage. They sat on their scales in an open space, on which the eight generators were focused; because of the need to water the fern and feed the hamster, there was enough room about them to permit one of the men in the focus area.

The generators had hardly been completed when Whitney began to show signs of nervousness. His scowling disquiet could hardly pass unnoticed by so sensitive a person as Condon.

"What's the matter, Bart," he asked, after Whitney—for the third time in less than an hour—had run from the windowless laboratory to peer into his large rear yard.

Whitney rubbed a meaty palm



"Shoot!" Condon whispered to his partner . . .

across his big chin and up over his bald scalp. "I'd swear I heard somebody prowling around out there," he growled. "There's been a leak, somewhere," he concluded heavily, his frowning eyes covering Condon's lugubrious features.

The mathematician swallowed as he soaked up the remark. "See here, Bart," he protested in his slow voice. "There's you, and there's me. When you look at me and say 'there's a leak somewhere', you mean me. Don't you, Bart?" His pouchy eyes were sunken deeper than ever in his face. His long nose, stuck like the blade of a cleaver in his face from forehead to mouth seemed longer still as he hung his head accusingly. His small lower jaw, half-hidden by the scraggly moustache

covering his upper lip, almost disappeared into his neck.

Whitney stuck out his big lower jaw, lips drawn back. His wide-spaced, discolored teeth were visible as he chomped on the cigar between them. "I'll let you figure out what I mean, Harry," he said, his meaning plain. "I'll tell you one thing, though; I'm installing photo-circuits all around this place. I want to know who the devil is traipsing around behind the bushes in my yard! A little more of this, and I'll yank out every hydrangea and hedge out there!"

Clearing his throat wetly, Condon shook his head. "That's ridiculous, Bart."

Whitney's grin was only a shade less than a sneer. "You mean, your

opinion is that it's ridiculous. Mine is that it makes excellent sense; I intend to know who's in my yard!"

BEFORE Condon could do more than swallow and work his tiny under-jaw, the bulky physicist had turned his back. Nor was he consulted during the succeeding days when Whitney wired the alarm-system, personally. That job had gone slowly, for all the physicist's experience and skill with electrical circuits—for both of them kept half an ear open for the constantly repeated cycle of sound from the generators. As the punched tape was advanced each half-minute, the click of relays could be heard through the whole lower floor. The generators would whine in an upward song, sustain their keening note for some ten seconds as the combination was tested, and then wail downward to silence before the relays advanced the tape another notch.

The installation of the photo-circuits was the start of it. Whitney's security-precautions were so thorough that Condon found they had begun to operate against *him*. It was, after all, Whitney's house, and Condon *did* leave nights, to sleep.

Leaving his last class the second Friday after the generators had been turned on, he loped like an ungainly crane toward the physicist's gabled and turreted old house on the Hill. In spite of pulling on the bell for a good ten minutes, he was unable to bring Whitney to the door. Cursing softly to himself, Condon made his way with slow, loping strides to the rear of the house. Repeated banging on the leaded glass of the back door brought no more success. Fully aware of how laughable he appeared, Condon peeked and peered in several windows, hoping to attract Whitney's attention through the heavy drapes.

Failing in that, he loped angrily homeward through the October dusk. A sleepless night decided him on settling things with Whitney the first thing Saturday morning.

He was more than a little surprised at the reception he got. The burglar-alarm, silent the preceding day, pealed plainly the moment he opened the gate at the sidewalk-end of the long flagstone walk leading up to the old house. Half-expecting that Whitney would be at the door to see who had walked through the front gate (for a tell-tale panel in the laboratory showed which circuit had been activated) he stood for some seconds without pulling the old-fashioned bell-ringer.

A motion visible out of the corner of his eye stopped him in the act of reaching for the teakwood knob; he turned with his usual slowness to his right, his scant lower jaw falling open with surprise.

Whitney was clearly visible in the adjoining bay window. His bald scalp glistened in the morning sun, but no more than the blued steel barrel of the Remington autoloader shotgun he had aimed at Condon.

"Bart!" Condon cried wetly; "it's me!" His slow movements barely gave him time to recoil from the threat before the physicist lowered the shotgun. The glower did not retreat from his heavy face as he stepped away from the window. Condon swallowed as he heard the other's footsteps coming to the front door, and heard the big bolts being shot back. The wide oak door swung back to reveal Whitney, still holding the gun in the crook of his arm.

THE THREATENING reception brought all Condon's wrath to the surface. He cleared his throat with a gurgle. "I've had about enough of this, Bart," he said firmly, stepping through the door.

"Enough of what?" Whitney replied curtly.

"This damned suspicion; this business of tell-tales and ringing bells. And now to have you poke a gun in my face! You're trying to..."

"I'm trying to keep your blabbing

mouth from ruining everything!" Whitney told him. "You dim-witted fool, this is the fourth time the alarm has gone off in the last few minutes! Somebody has been prowling the back yard! Now what the devil have you been telling about our generators?" He advanced toward the mathematician, menacingly, the gun somehow aiming at him.

Condon was not ready for that kind of answer. During most of the night, his angry thoughts had rehearsed the conversation he would have with Whitney. But it had always been played with Condon in the role of accuser.

He swallowed away the wetness constantly in his throat, and his slow voice broke forth at last. "I have not spoken of our work with the generators to a soul. I have not hinted we were working together. Nor have I been silent when silence would have aroused interest. Bart, this is paranoia—or worse." Condon's mournful eyes brooded so ominously that Whitney's eyebrows shot toward his bald scalp.

"What do you mean, worse?"

Condon clamped his teeth together, the movement making his jaw smaller and his cleaver of a nose longer than ever. "I mean that these damned precautions of yours haven't kept any interested person out of the laboratory—except me. Which naturally leads to the question; were they directed against me?" The heavy pouches beneath his eyes darkened with the accusation.

"And *you* talk about paranoia!" Whitney sneered openly. "Why, of all the..."

But he did not finish the epithet; the alarm sounded again in the laboratory.

"That's paranoia, too," he demanded, spinning on his heel and rushing through the long, dark center hall to the rear door. Condon cantered after him, elbows flying away from his sides with his loose, flopping gait. His thoughts churned with confusion.

CHAPTER II

FROM THE rear porch, the yard behind the house was fully visible. It was plainly empty of human life. The muzzle of the goosegun made a quick, lethal circuit of the shrubs and bushes, but no target could be seen.

Condon's eyes followed the gaze of the muzzle, his head bobbing as he swallowed and cleared the wetness from his throat. He could not repress a gurgling chuckle. "Birds," he said hollowly, nodding to himself. "The birds are flying through the yard and cutting your light beams every now and then."

The big bald man with the gun did not take his eyes off the suspected area. "What kind of a physicist do you take me for?" he asked, half-absently. "The relays have delays built in them; no cutting of the beam as brief as a bird's flight would set them off. They are timed to intercept an object the size of a man, even at sprinting speed; birds wouldn't occult the beam long enough."

Puzzle and confusion flooded back into Condon's thoughts; he rubbed his thin hands together, unconsciously aping Whitney's continued visual search of the rear yard. His slow responses finally formed the words. "How many times did you say the alarm-bell rang?"

Whitney lowered the pointless weapon and turned back to his colleague. "Three times before you came up the front way," he said. "Damned good thing you didn't decide to go around back like..." He stopped in mid-sentence.

It wasn't lost on Condon, of course; he had to swallow before he could speak, but Whitney waited. "Like what?" Condon pursued him.

"Like nothing," Whitney grumbled. "See here," he said suddenly, "you're sure you *weren't* out back?"

It was Condon's turn to create

distrust. "I didn't say that," he replied slowly. Whitney's frown cleared. "But, Bart, I *wasn't* out back; I came in the front." Somewhere, hidden under his moustache, was a smile.

The frown came back, twice as black as before. "Now, wait a minute, Harry," Whitney growled. "You mean to tell me you haven't been poking around this rear yard for the last half-hour?"

The smile came out from behind the camouflage of the moustache. Condon allowed himself time to swallow twice, and then to clear his throat before he spoke. "You are trying to tell me, of course," he said with the polite nastiness reserved for the well-educated and genteel, "that you thought it was I all the time!" He craned forward toward the other. "Eh?" he demanded.

Whitney brushed the question aside with one wave of his big hand. "Damn it!" he said impatiently. "Were you..."

Quick for once, Condon interrupted him. "Now, Bart," he said with falsely-mild reproof. "Did you honestly expect any one else to break those light beams? Let's get this thing out in the..."

"The devil!" Whitney boomed. "You're positive you were not in back?"

Condon swallowed, his head bobbing on his scrawny neck. "Certainly," he told him with calm dignity.

"Then somebody *is* trying to get in!" Whitney said with a gasp, admitting without further pretense the accuracy of Condon's accusation. "The alarm went off three times. I tell you, about ten minutes apart; the last time just a couple minutes before you came up the walk."

"And you thought it was I out here in the back, of course," Condon said slowly, wetly.

"Yes, I did," he replied.

"And carried the gun around with you, of course?"

THE SILENCE was a stiff one, but Condon could hardly say that

Whitney seemed embarrassed about it.

Condon nodded, his mouth working invisibly, but making little wet sounds. "I guess it is a good thing I didn't come in through the back, as you say, Bart," he said at last. Quite suddenly he realized the deadliness of what was going on. He could not keep from taking one faltering step backward toward the house. Whitney moved toward him in unconscious, deadly concert.

The murderous hush was ripped to shreds by the clangor of the alarm-bell. Condon, fearful for his life, was still facing Whitney and the rear yard. And Whitney, in facing Condon, had his back toward the protected area. Only Condon's slow responses kept him from giving away what flashed before his eyes.

Very clearly he saw a figure, standing just behind a forsythia denuded of its leaves by the first frosts. It was a man, standing with his right arm upraised, the hand flexed sharply down at the wrist, the fingers fairly well extended. He saw at once that the man was bald and, as far as he could tell through the partial concealment of the bush, quite naked.

He recognized the bald figure at once; it was Whitney.

The man he had recognized, who stood fully clothed just to one side of his line of vision, whirled at the peal of the alarm. But before Whitney could bring his head around to the spot where the other, naked Whitney stood, a statue of flesh, the second Whitney vanished.

Condon's lower jaw fell open; his mouth gaped like a hole in his neck, fringed with black, scraggly hair. His lips only slowly formed the involuntary cry of "Whitney!" His thoughts raced with lightning-speed ahead of the formation of the word, and stopped it in mid-course. The picture had painted itself with the instant and pelucid clarity of *gestalt* on the convolutions of his brain: the picture, its cause, and its use.

"I saw him," Condon said at last.

Whitney did not turn from the yard nor lift his bald, sweaty head from the stock of the shotgun.

"Where?"

Condon swallowed, more to stall for time than to rid his throat of the ever-present wetness. He forced himself to think it through to be sure of himself before he said another word. His mental processes, speeded by the catalyst of hate and fear, played the grisly drama to the end.

"He popped up from behind that forsythia," Condon breathed, taking a slow step to his side. "Keep your gun on it. He seems to raise his head every few minutes, and ducks back when the alarm goes off; beyond a doubt he is trying to thread his way through your light-beams."

"Not a chance!" Whitney hissed vehemently. "I've got that yard criss-crossed to the point where a flea couldn't get through without showing himself."

THE MINUTES dragged on interminably. All was silent, save for the rustle of brown leaves on the oak in one corner of the big yard. Whitney's gun scanned the premises, crossing and recrossing the shrubbery.

Condon craned his cleaver-nosed face at his wrist-watch. If his appreciation were right, Whitney's double would reappear in another ten minutes. Condon's big concern was whether he could keep the Whitney who held the gun, in instant-readiness that long. His fear had some basis; the bald physicist's face came away from the stock after a minute or two, and the muzzle drooped. Quick as Condon knew the other was, it would take snap-shooting of the first order to catch his target.

He cleared his throat. "Keep ready!" he urged softly.

"I'm ready," Whitney snarled. "Just let him poke his head up..."

Condon subsided, but took another mournful look at his watch. When he thought there were only moments to go, he gasped softly, but loudly enough for the other to hear.

"What? Did you see something?" Whitney whispered.

"I thought I did," Condon told him; "get your gun on that forsythia again."

"A mouse couldn't hide behind that thing," Whitney protested in whispered anger, but the gun came up, and his cheek flattened against the stock.

The bald statue reappeared in exactly the same spot and position.

"Shoot!" Condon gasped, but Whitney was quicker. The Remington roared as he squeezed the trigger; quick as the automatic was, the second load of shot blasted toward an empty rear yard. Whitney's big jaw dropped with puzzlement.

"Lord, but he dropped fast!" he said, jumping down the steps and running toward the bush.

They found no one there, nor any sign of blood. Whitney stormed off toward other corners of the yard, oblivious to the clamor of the alarm as his passage cut light beam after light beam. He came back, finally, to where Condon crouched, all knees and elbows, on the humus at the base of the bush.

"What's that?" Whitney demanded.

Condon raised his cleaver-nosed face slowly. His mouth smacked wetly as he swallowed. "Nothing," he said somberly. "I was looking for footprints." He got to his feet, deliberately, palming the battered shot he had picked from the decaying leaves.

"I don't understand it," Whitney said.

"Nor I," Condon replied, turning back to the old house with his slow lope. "He was inhumanly quick, I must say. Or we were so certain that he had dropped behind that forsythia that our eyes never followed him away behind the privet hedge."

"I still don't see how he did it," Whitney protested. "I'm waiting."

"Don't waste your time, Bert," Condon said. "He knows we're on to him, now, and doesn't relish being shot

at, I'm sure. Turn off your damned alarm and let's get into the laboratory. As long as we're in it, certainly, he can't do anything."

Whitney grumbled a while longer about his poor shooting, but in a minute or two followed Condon into the windowless addition to the house. The mathematician turned off the alarm himself, knowing that it would sound in scant seconds if he did not do so promptly.

CHAPTER III

THEY WERE bothered by no more prowlers. On the other hand, the surprising discovery that there really *was* a prowler had sobered and puzzled Whitney. The whole atmosphere was changed. Perhaps because the shotgun had returned to its place in the gun-rack in the hall, Condon's fear for his own safety diminished. Whitney made a number of gruff, clumsy attempts to question him; Condon discouraged conversation with interminable pauses while he swallowed and cleared his throat. His vague, wet responses left Whitney unsure how to proceed. It takes two to make a conversation, and Condon was too much of a tactician to surrender in talk any of the advantage he knew he possessed, now. Before noon, he found his hat and left. He could feel Whitney's puzzled, angry frown on his back as he made his sombre, crane-like way down the walk.

With him, in his pocket, were the scraps of lead he had found beneath the forsythia.

In his own library, Condon pressed the door shut, turned on the green-shaded light on his desk and laid the battered pieces of metal on the polished mahogany.

There were only two of them. In spite of a rather careful search, con-

ducted while Whitney had dashed about the big yard looking for the prowler, Condon had been able to find no others.

He turned them over, thoughtfully, with the tip of a pencil, his cleaver of a nose bent close to the desk. Two quite badly-deformed spheres of lead. Chilled shot, he knew they were—chilled shot deformed by striking human flesh. *Number twos*, he thought, *typical goose load, just what Whitney would have put in the Remington.*

Condon leaned back in his chair, his narrow, unfortunate face more gloomy than ever as he let his thoughts recreate at leisure what they had sprung to in one electric instant on the rear porch of Whitney's home.

First, the generators worked; they produced temporal displacement of matter. They had, in fact, sent Bart Whitney through "time"; but not quite the way either of them had figured.

What were the facts? In the first place, the travel had been *backward* in "time", which was the opposite of what they had planned. In the second place, it was not a continuous temporal displacement; Whitney had appeared behind the forsythia for a period of less than a second, at intervals of about ten minutes. It was that regularity which had been a crucial datum in Condon's appreciation of what had happened. The analogy was resonance, the resonance of a coil. Undoubtedly, that was what had happened, or was it right to say, what *would* happen? At some moment in the future, Whitney *would* step into the focus of the generators. For some reason, one of the coils would be resonating—possibly on some sine-wave cycle—with the result that it would come into beat every few microseconds, and displace Whitney into the "past". But, because of the sine-wave cycle of resonance, Condon could see, each moment of displacement would be for a different interval into the "past".

How long that would go on, he

could not quite decide. He knew that the punch-tape would provide for only five or six seconds peak generation of each family of force-fields before proceeding to the next permutation. Whitney had probably been displaced five or six times, appearing about a second each time; but each short temporal displacement being about ten minutes less into "past time" than the one preceding it.

ONE THING puzzled the mathematician, and he rolled it over in his thoughts the way a man will roll a tasty drink over his tongue. Why had Whitney appeared *outside* the laboratory? Why had there been displacement in "space" as well as in "time"? Condon was unable to get any mathematical picture of a relationship of the "time-stream" to so small a spacial displacement. Either there should have been a displacement of thousands of miles (depending on the amount of "time-travel") or none, he decided. But—in fact there had been a displacement of some forty yards; it was a problem of keen interest.

But there were other problems. The most engrossing was whether Whitney had killed himself. Two number-two chilled shot at thirty yards or so will kill a goose, to be sure; but will they kill a man? It would depend on where they struck. Even in the head, there would only be certain areas where they would surely be fatal. Condon had no qualms about one thing. Once he had committed himself, in full knowledge of what he was doing, to the cry of "*Shoot!*", he wanted Whitney dead. Actually, he decided, there was no other way, and Whitney's actions had spoken the same belief, loudly. The thing was so big that one or the other would surely be killed before they were through.

As for whether Whitney had killed, or merely wounded, himself, there was nothing he could do but wait, Condon decided. There were other questions,

too, but he saw no way of resolving them. For instance—how far had Whitney been displaced into the "past"? Or, to put it another way, how long would Condon have to wait before Whitney, walking into the focus of the generators, would suddenly slump to the floor with two shot-wounds in him? (But no shot, obviously, since they had remained in the yard.)

Whenever that would happen, Condon decided, would be a good time to be elsewhere—with at least three competent, reliable witnesses. And it would be a good time to stay away from the laboratory for several hours, until *rigor mortis* had set in—or at least long enough so that the medical examiner would have no trouble in deciding that Condon had not been present when death occurred.

When death occurred. That began to trouble Condon. *Would it occur?* Were the wounds fatal?

CONDON leaned farther back in his chair. Baggy lids slipped down half across his mournful eyes. He let his thoughts rotate in relaxed slowness about the problem. He must visualize the thing; he had been given a glimpse of the "future", and from that pebble the mountain was implicit.

He could see Whitney again, the naked Whitney. Yes, and Condon could see him as he would have to be in the future. Whitney, in the focus of the generators, his hand in the air. . . . His hand in the air. Condon could see it now: the hand reaching up, the fingers pointing down. He let his lids slip the rest of the way, closing his eyes. What was Whitney doing? Yes. . . reaching up to the gamma circuit coil, with his fingers pointing down as his hand went inside it to touch the tuning knob.

But that, of course, posited that Whitney had some reason for wanting to adjust the coil.

And then it dawned on Condon. This was the biggest question of all;

it was a stunner. It leaped clear out of mathematics—or proved, once and for all, that where mathematics ends, philosophy begins, or that mathematics was a little niche in metaphysics, or that...

Well, what *did* it prove? It asked a question, all right. Condon phrased it carefully. This was no time to be caught in his own semantic traps. He put it this way: If he, Condon, did not arrange conditions so that Whitney would want to adjust that coil, would Whitney ever enter the focus? Would the event that Condon had seen ever take place in the "future"? In other words, was it now *inevitable* that Whitney would be displaced temporally? Or did it require Condon's participation? *Could* Condon, by choice, allow the event to occur or not occur?

The mathematician broke out in a cold sweat; wetness surged back chokingly into his throat. He cleared his throat loudly, liquidly. It was one thing to take advantage of events; it was another to arrange things so that Whitney would be trapped by those events. That was, in the fully legal sense, murder—where the other was... Well, *what* was it? The law certainly had no name for it; *Whitney* had pulled the trigger.

The final puzzler, after all, Condon decided, was whether he, himself, was a "free agent" in the thing. Granted that it would take his own realignment of the coils to produce *backward* travel in "time", was he free to tamper with the generators or not, as he saw fit; or was he inevitably "ordained" to do so? Even more, if he, Condon, did nothing about it, would some other event drag Whitney into the focus at the strategic instant?

It was too much; it hardly made semantic sense, and Condon was sure he could not describe his thoughts mathematically. The walls of his library seemed a prison to his thoughts. He strode away like a distraught camel, and sought refuge in a bar. The baffled churning of his thoughts had

disquieted him in a way he could not recall happening before.

The whiskey had a raw taste, but somehow the alcohol soothed the wild spinning of his mind, slowed his gyrations, until at last his thoughts centered fully.

He looked up from the hypnotic gleam of the shot glass, and cast a sombre glance around the bar. It was nearly deserted in the quiet of midafternoon. Condon had no wish for his actions to give him away. No one seemed to pay any attention to him.

HE RETURNED to contemplation of his now empty glass. It was really beside the point, Condon decided at last, whether he was predestined to tamper with the generators. Granted that he was free, he still wanted Whitney dead. He found it hard to conceive any other cause for tampering. Certainly, Bart would not touch the coils in the midst of an experiment; certainly he would not tune out the gamma-circuit, no matter what else he might do. He was too good a physicist to set the whole works resonating. Condon could see no out for it; it was simply up to him to reverse the generators.

He could still have a perfect alibi. He could see himself making a quick adjustment in the fields; a departure; Whitney's appearance at some later time; the shooting; the medical examination. Perhaps it would not be necessary to return and realign the force-fields to their original setting. After all, who besides Condon and Whitney could understand them? Who could tell that they had ever been changed in their alignment?

That thought was the decision. Condon directed his ungainly stride slowly back to the high-gabled Victorian house. No alarm-bells rang as he opened the gate and climbed the flagstone walk to the front door. He pulled the teakwood knob, and was admitted after a few moments by a frowning Whitney.

"What now?" he demanded irritably.

Condon smiled invisibly behind the scraggle of his moustache. "I'm worried, Bart," he said, his head bobbing as he swallowed. "This prowler thing has me concerned. Do you think you should be here alone?"

Whitney shook his bald head and shrugged. "How should I know? I thought you were sure we had frightened him off."

The mathematician moved uneasily from foot to foot. "Now I'm not so sure," he gurgled. He cleared his throat. "I'm going to take another look around."

"Suit yourself," Whitney said shortly. "Take the gun with you. damn it. If he so much as shows his little toe, blast away at it."

Feeling certain he would find opportunity before the day was out to be in the laboratory unobserved, Condon followed Whitney's suggestion, and hung the Remington in his arm. He was not a quick shot, he knew, but his deliberate responses were at least accurate.

Whitney retreated immediately into the cubicle, where the generators whined and sang as they moved from permutation to permutation. So far, none of the samples in the focus had been displaced.

Condon loped through the gloom of the center hall to the rear porch. He had an idea that he might hunt for more shot, but the impulse was only half-hearted. Pushing open the leaded-glass door he was nearly jarred out of his consciousness by the flickering appearance and blotting out of a pink, bald statue of flesh, in the same deadly spot by the forsythia. Was Whitney's body still resonating in time? Had it been flickering in and out of the yard all through the afternoon?

CHAPTER IV

THERE could be no question that the double had reappeared, bald and pink. Confused as Condon's thoughts were by this most unexpected manifestation, the ten-minute interval was twenty times as long as he needed to think of the obvious. Whitney would reappear once again at the end of ten minutes, as he had done before; this time more than two shot would hit him.

Condon bent his huge beak over and carefully checked the gun. Its safety was off; there was a shell in the chamber. Straightening up, he walked slowly down the steps, a gloomy camel of a man, his pulse hammering hollowly in his ears. His hidden mouth worked with noisy wetness as he loped with deadly purpose toward the forsythia. A minute or two before the expected time of reappearance, he raised the muzzle, planted his feet firmly in the browning turf, and laid his hollow cheek against the polished-walnut of the stock.

Carefully he keyed his nerves. The response would have to be almost instantaneous; his finger tightened slowly. The pink, bald apparition snapped into being. The goose-gun roared heavily. Condon was almost sure he saw the figure reel slightly in the split second before it winked into nothingness.

Whitney was in the yard almost before the echoes had died. "Did you get him?" he yelled.

Condon shook his head and cleared his throat with a wet rattle. "Don't know that I even saw him," he said slowly. "My eyes may have been playing tricks on me in the dusk." He paused to swallow. "I shot first and thought about it afterwards," he concluded with owlish gravity.

"Damn!" Whitney swore. "I should have turned the alarm back on!" He turned quickly and ran heavily back toward the laboratory. Condon walked

forward a few paces to the forsythia bush. He knelt awkwardly in the humus. He picked up thirty or forty shot, some badly battered, obviously bespeaking contact with bone. He had aimed at the head. A soft sigh escaped him. There was no question in his mind now. Whitney would be dead.

For some reason the alarm did not ring again. The fact cheered Condon; he felt sure the blast from the shotgun had keeled Whitney over, knocking him out of the focus. He found it easy to wait for his moments alone with the generators.

Still on the grounds of concern about the prowler, Condon remained in the old house when Whitney finally decided to retire for the night. There had been but little conversation, all of it ill-tempered on Whitney's part, and none of it important; Condon knew the issue was settled, and wanted no trouble with Whitney.

Waiting until he was sure his enemy was asleep, Condon opened the heavy fire-door that separated the laboratory from the rest of the old house. The light-tubes were never turned out, so that the place was fully lit. The big, irregular crystal of copper sulfate shone greenly on its scale. The hamster, perhaps awakened by his entrance, scampered briefly about its cage, chittering tinnily. Condon walked slowly through the singing, whining racket of the generators.

HE TOOK his time; there were several issues at stake. First, Condon reversed the eight delta-coils, which controlled the direction of "time travel". Next, fully confident of their earlier mathematics, now that he knew the generators worked, he tuned the power-circuits so that about fifty-nine hours temporal displacement would occur. Since he had seen the bald and naked statue of Whitney in the rear yard shortly after nine on Saturday morning, that would call for Whitney's presence in the focus about eight in the evening on the following Mon-

day. The time was chosen, because Condon had been invited to join a small faculty group at the home of a colleague at that hour.

With Whitney dead at eight, Condon felt he would be more than safe in returning to the laboratory after the evening with friends—perhaps after midnight—and removing all traces of his plot.

For there was one small element of risk. To be certain that Whitney would be in the focus at the appointed hour, Condon felt he must provide Whitney with a reason. *Forget the aspects of predestination*, he told himself. *These things are going to happen; you have already seen that they did happen.*

His choice of a method was simple and direct. Constructing from one of the unused clocks in the laboratory a simple time-clock, he wired it in circuit with the alarm-bell that would signal the temporal displacement of one of the samples in the focus of the generators. Were that bell to ring, signalling success of the experiment, Condon was certain that Whitney would dash at once to the generators, to see which sample had been accepted by the "time-fields".

With respect to one final question—whether the family of fields that would displace human protoplasm would, in fact, be generated at the crucial instant—Condon had no qualms at all. He recognized fate when he saw it. He did not even bother to calculate which family of fields as punched out in the tape would be in the control mechanism at the fatal instant. Later for that.

He proceeded to detune the gamma-circuit coil, until his instruments showed just the resonating cycle that, empirically, he knew was required.

His final act on leaving the laboratory was to remove the screws from the latch of one window, to permit entrance after Whitney was dead. The long lope home, through the blackness of a late October night was something he could scarcely recall, so full was

his mind of what it would mean to him to have sole possession of the generators.

•

Sunday was a long day. Condon spent a good deal of it examining the second group of shot he had collected from beneath the forsythia bush. There were thirty-eight, all told, of which sixteen were badly deformed. Sixteen holes in the skull, at a distance of ten or twelve feet, was sure death.

•

Monday traveled more quickly. Condon had three classes, and the forenoon was over before his nerves had begun to tighten. The afternoon was harder. Normally as withdrawn as his melancholy features proclaimed, Condon took pains to seek out students, and other members of the faculty, engaging them in conversation throughout the dwindling hours of daylight.

He could not eat dinner; in spite of every attempt at relaxation his normally tranquil, slow-acting nervous system was keyed up to a pitch that was to him as unbearable as it was unusual.

He could not bring himself to arrive late at Professor Zorn's. Although the invitation was for eight, he found himself ringing the door bell at seven-thirty—to surprise Zorn still in his carpet slippers and Mrs. Zorn but three-quarters through the two-hour ritual of female preparation. He tried to do their bidding and make himself comfortable, but it was an impossible task.

CONDON was far from his normal self that night; tension seemed to force him into conversation. Where, normally, he was quite content on such occasions to listen to his more volatile colleagues settle the ills of the world,

or obscure points of scholarship, this Monday night he entered nervously, excitedly into discussions as remote from mathematics as the dating of Folsom points and the Celtic heritage of the Germanic languages.

Perhaps because of his participation, the discussions lasted far past midnight; it was almost three in the morning before Condon found himself opening the gate to the old house on Danbury Hill.

It appeared that Whitney had not discovered the window-latch with which he had tampered. Slowly conning his cleaver-nosed visage around the darkness, Condon decided it was safe to make his awkward way in through the window. At that moment, he had no desire to be caught like some common prowler, breaking his way into a house that sheltered a corpse.

Pushing the heavy drapes aside, Condon advanced with a hesitant, lurching gait through the old front parlor. Pausing at the entrance to the center hall, he let his senses take in every sound. The repetitive whine of the generators pervaded every old timber of the place; nothing else moved or could be heard.

The big fire-door to the laboratory opened at the urging of his sweating hands, the brilliant lighting from within bringing momentary life to the hall.

The big crystal of copper sulfate gleamed greenly, and the hamster chattered. But beside the little creature's cage, Whitney was stretched on the floor.

Horried, in spite of all his mental preparation, Condon advanced slowly toward the body. He breathed heavily through his open mouth, swallowing constantly to rid himself of the wetness.

There was remarkably little blood, and the head seemed scarcely damaged—nothing compared to what Condon had expected thirty-eight shot would do at close range. Stepping carefully to keep his shoes from what little

blackish trickle had stained the floor, he advanced to reset the "time-coils". His first act was to reach up to tune the gamma-coil out of resonance.

For an instant, Condon's vision flickered in the oddest manner, and he had a flashing momentary impression of the rear of the old house and of a figure facing him, crouched over a gun barrel. His slow responses had no chance to move his body. The full charge from the Remington struck him in the face. He reeled, and fell with thirty-eight holes in his head atop Whitney's corpse. The generators whined down in an eerie diminuendo; relays clicked; punched tape advanced another notch, and the generators rose in a whining crescendo once again.

There was a vicious irony about it. Whitney, as Condon had clearly perceived, had shot and killed himself at about nine on that fateful Saturday morning. Seven hours later Condon had likewise shot and killed *himself*.

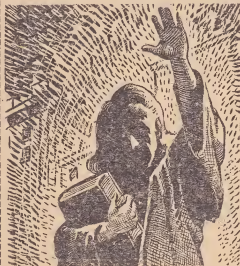
At eight on Monday evening the punched tape had triggered the generators in one combination of force-fields that accepted living human protoplasm. But seven hours later—at three the following morning, when Condon had reached up to detune the gamma-coil—it had triggered still another combination of fields that accepted living human protoplasm.

The word "living" is important, because the force-fields would not accept the Whitney that was dead; even more fundamental to Condon's error, they would not accept Condon's hair, which was like all hair, also dead. It was that baldness and pinkness, at four in the afternoon on Saturday, which had made him miss the one really important point; the second statue of flesh was his own.

Or did it really matter? It was going to happen, anyway; Condon seems to have proved that much.

★

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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

DID SCIENCE FICTION PREDICT ATOMIC ENERGY?

SPECIAL ARTICLE

By Robert A. Madle and Sam Moskowitz



ON AUGUST 5, 1945, the most destructive war in the history of civilization was brought to a cataclysmic conclusion, and, for once, the adjective is apt. The United States Air Force dropped an atom-bomb on Hiroshima, and, although Japan did not surrender for several days, this marked the demise of Japan as a world power—and ushered in the atomic age.

Naturally, very few people knew what an "atomic bomb" was: most were not aware of the amazing expenditure of effort and money which had brought about the release of this energy—energy almost beyond comprehension in the "Man-Made" world. They did not realize that had there not been involved a world conflict, this power might not have been unleashed for decades, that only our tremendous resources made this bomb possible, and that we weren't too far ahead of German atomic experimentation.

However, there was a group of

people who, although likewise astonished, were able to comprehend immediately the meaning of atomic energy. This group was the readers and writers of science-fiction. For several decades, science-fiction magazines had contained stories concerning atomic energy—stories telling of the harnessing of the basic power of the universe. Science-fictionists had read and written stories of atomic energy being used to propel space-craft through the stellar void, to bring about a scientific utopian world state, to giant cities, and so on.

But how closely did science-fiction predict nuclear fact?

We know that all existing matter and energy is composed of "atoms". Under proper conditions, through an electro-chemical process, these atoms can be exploded artificially—releasing the energy they contain, in the process. It is similar to the process through which the sun produces heat and light.

The energy within atomic particles

is of such proportions (1) that, when released in an uncontrolled fashion—as were the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki—it acts as a fantastically-powerful explosive. When released in a controlled manner, such as in an atomic-pile, it transmutes into radioactive matter, and transmits to surrounding objects radioactive rays.

The problem now is to build a workable engine powered by atomic energy, in a manner which will not explode or emit radioactive rays and particles too powerful for shielding.

TALES of the atom have been part of the stock-in-trade of writers for many years; Shakespeare referred to the infinitesimal particles of matter, when he said, "It is easy to count atomies as a lover's propositions." (2) The atom-theme has been extrapolated in nearly every ramification imaginable. There have been "scientific fantasies" in which the author, by imbuing the component parts of the atom with personalities similar to those of human beings, goes on to expound sugar-coated lessons. (3) There have been tales which accepted the theory that atoms and their surrounding field of electrons are sub-microscopic suns and planets, going on from there to transplant normal men or women—through an obscure processes of diminution—upon those electron worlds; they then run the gamut of other-worldly adventures. One science-fiction author in particular wrote a "classic" in this vein. (4)

An interesting variation on this theme is a tale in which a scientist

sends a young man and woman down into the realm of the atom; when the time comes to bring them back he discovers that their lives proceeded at an accelerated rate in ratio to their tiny universe, and only descendants of their children remain to tell him of the legend of the original Adam and Eve of their world. (5) Somewhat the reverse of this is the story of a terrestrial who breaks out of the universe of his atom into the macrocosmos of a super-universe. (6) These stories, of course, contain much fanciful information in regard to the structure and the known eccentricities of the atom.

The idea of atomic power has been used so often during the years that it is rarely able to maintain interest on the strength of its own uniqueness. In science-fiction stories of today it is simply one other integral element woven into a web-work of unusual plot and "advanced" theorizing. Long before 1945, readers generally accepted it as something that would come to pass—although few realized how soon. The following quotation is typical of this type of story:

"...Roxite. That was the fuel that made these star-ships possible—the substance whose elemental atoms could be split with tremendous fury to release an inconceivable flood of power controlled by the comparatively tiny Roxite engines which curbed these terrific energies and directed them into the proper channels of usefulness. (7)

In this story, the discovery of atomic energy is an accomplished fact, and has been put to many uses.

(1) Up until August, 1945, it was believed that there could be no change in the amount of matter or the amount of energy in the universe. Einstein was the first to theorize on the possibility of a small amount of matter turning into a tremendous amount of energy.

(2) "As You Like It," Act III, Scene ii, 1. 233.

(3) Joseph W. Skidmore, "The Romance of Posi and Nega," *Amazing Stories*, (Sept., 1932).

(4) Ray Cummings, "The Girl in the Golden Atom," *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, Sept.-Oct., 1939).

(5) R. F. Starzl, "Out of the Sub-Universe," *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, (Summer, 1928).

(6) Donald Wandrei, "Colossus," *Astounding Stories*, (Jan., 1934).

(7) Sam Moskowitz, "The Way Back," *Comet*, (Jan., 1941), p. 74.

There are hundreds of tales of this type—stories set in the far future, atomic energy having been discovered centuries before—and a review of all of them would be an exhausting task. Here, we want to consider stories which dealt with work on atomic energy, its discovery, and consequences of this discovery.

ONE OF the older and better tales of atomic energy is the work of that grand old master of the unusual—H. G. Wells. (8) In this story Wells relates a yarn of the invention of an *atomic bomb*, its use in warfare, and the resultant social chaos. Here is Wells the preacher, as well as the prophet, injecting his pet social theories into the story. In the light of contemporary fact, these theories remain quite convincing. This is a novel of Europe at war, and the simultaneous discovery of a method of unleashing the atom's energy by both England and France, and its subsequent use. Instead of *Uranium 235*, Wells has his *Carolinum* give off a continual series of comparatively small explosions. He shows the eventual entry of Japan and the United States into the world-wide war.

Eventually, to save themselves from destruction, the nations form a world council. Wells then points out how atomic energy, by its very cheapness, left millions unemployed, and all attempts to reinstate capitalism failed. Finally, man approaches the portals of good old Utopian World State. This novel is one of the longest, most readable, and most capably thought-out of "atomic energy" stories; it may still take on new significance in the light of world events.

Wells describes the *Carolinum* reaction as follows:

"Never before in the history of war-

fare had there been a continuing explosive; indeed, up to the middle of the twentieth century the only explosives known were combustibles whose explosiveness was due entirely to their instantaneousness; and these atomic bombs which science burst upon the world that night were strange even to the men who used them. Those used by the allies were lumps of pure *Carolinum*, painted on the outside with un-oxidized cydonator inductive enclosed hermetically in a case of membranum. A little celluloid stud between the handles by which the bomb was lifted was arranged so as to be easily torn off and admit air to the inductive, which at once became active and set up radio-activity in the outer layer of the *Carolinum* sphere. This liberated fresh inductive, and so in a few moments the whole bomb was a blazing continual explosion." (9)

Soon after the publication of "The World Set Free", there appeared another novel in a similar vein. This story—of 1915 vintage—dealt with an unscrupulous South American inventor who constructs a machine that

"...by changing the combination of wave-length and vibra-vibratory frequency...can make of an explosive a dead thing that neither percussion nor fire will detonate...or can make it explode spontaneously and without the help of either percussion or fire; and can do it by wireless from a distance." (10)

Taking advantage of an incident wherein a Japanese warship is denied immediate passage through the Panama Canal, this inventor sends a wire to the Panama authorities. In the wire he states that, in the name of the Japanese government, all army installations at Panama will be blown to nothingness unless fifty million dollars is paid to Japan to assuage the Mikado's pride. By quick action, several heroes sneak out and torpedo the South American's ship, sending inventor and invention to the bottom of the sea. This story is long and

(8) "The World Set Free," E. P. Dutton, New York, 1914.

(9) H. G. Wells, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

(10) Francis Lynde, "The Inert Atom," *The Popular Magazine*, (April 23, 1915), p. 92.

drawn-out, and not too well written. It is vague, scientifically, but is a notable example of an early attempt of an author to stumble through the atom theme.

IN THE 1920's one of the early "interplanetary classics" was published; here atomic power was the method by which the space craft was propelled through the void. This novel, written in 1915, compiled perhaps the largest collection of rejection slips extant until it finally appeared in *Amazing Stories* in 1928. Twenty years later it was published in book form, and reprinted two years after that. (11) It concerns a young inventor who releases atomic energy and immediately utilizes it for space travel. This "drive" is so powerful that he doesn't bother to stay in our own solar-system, but flits from one planetary system to another via the use of his atom-exploding mechanism. Two sequels to this novel appeared in magazine and book form; and, for sheer imaginative adventure, they are difficult to equal. The young inventor or partially explains his power thusly:

"...I have found that in one the power is liberated as a similar attractive force, but is focused upon...that axis of the bar. As long as the current is applied it remains focused upon that object, no matter what comes in between. In the second borderline condition the power is liberated as a terrific repulsion...the copper is completely transformed into available energy, there being no heat whatever liberated." (12)

It was not until 1920 that a more

advanced type of atomic story in the true "scientifiction" (13) style appeared in the pages of *Amazing Stories*. This story concerns the success of a German scientist in his efforts to smash the atom. (14) The gigantic explosion agitates and sets off surrounding atoms and a gigantic vortex is formed which sweeps across the continent of Europe, leaving oblivion in its wake. Finally, natural forces come to the aid of man; as the core of the atomic vortex passes over Mount Vesuvius, the volcano erupts. Simultaneously a tornado strikes the vortex. The result is that the agitated atoms are sent clear out of the earth's atmosphere, ending the threat of world disaster.

NO LESS than four stories have been published with the world-shaking title of "The Atom Smasher." The first of these (15) describes how a scientist unlocks the secret of the incredible energy. The radiation of its explosion is a weirdly-beautiful violet light, similar to those described by eye-witnesses of *Uranium 235* explosions. This scientist, with the use of atomic power, invents a time-machine, kidnaps a man and girl, and goes cruising back into the past.

The second of these stories appeared a few years later. (16) This one features one of the most accurate descriptions of the releasing of atomic forces ever put on paper. So close does the author's description parallel the newspaper reports of the New Mexico Atomic Bomb Test that one

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- (11) E. E. Smith, Ph.D., *The Skylark of Space*, F.F.F. Publishers, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1950.
 - (12) E. E. Smith, Ph.D., *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.
 - (13) A combination of the words *scientific* and *fiction*. Hugo Gernsback, noted publisher of scientific periodicals, coined the word in 1923 when he announced the name of his forthcoming magazine, *Scientifiction*. Apparently the reading-public was allergic to such a portmanteau, for the response was negligible. However, when the magazine was again announced as *Amazing Stories*, the response was enthusiastic.
 - (14) V. Orlovsky, "The Revolt of the Atoms," *Amazing Stories*, (April, 1929).
 - (15) Victor Rosseau, "The Atom Smasher," *Astounding Stories*, (May, 1930).
 - (16) P. Schuyler Miller, "The Atom Smasher," *Amazing Stories*, (Feb., 1934.)

cannot help but wonder if some newspaper writer didn't borrow from the author's text. There is very little story here; simply the invention, and the fatal explosion of the atom.

The third story (17) scarcely deserves consideration; but the last of the quartet is unique, (18) inasmuch as it was the first to suggest a counter-agent against the atomic bomb. In this story an American invents the atomic bomb; the secret is stolen, and shortly thereafter Seattle and Washington are destroyed. The inventor is killed, but, fortunately, he left behind instructions for manipulating an apparatus that generates rays which will blow up every scrap of metal which composes the atomic machines. As for counter-agents: they are rarely mentioned except in stories of the far future when atomic power is an accepted fact, and "screens of force" have been erected against them with atomic power as the source of their radiation.

In 1929, a young MIT sophomore wrote a story concerning the perfection of space-travel after the releasing of atomic energy. (19) Today he is an atomic expert, and is the author of one of the most interesting discourses on atomic power that has been written for lay consumption. (20) In 1935, the aforementioned author, John W. Campbell, under a pseudonym, related the story of a scientist who spends years of his life studying the sun at close range to observe and perfect atomic energy. (21) During this time, he loses his eyesight, and when he returns to Earth he discovers that one of his

former inventions, a device for extracting energy from the heat of air, is actually cheaper and safer than atomic energy. The old man is broken-hearted when he realizes that the world doesn't want the invention he gave his eyesight to perfect.

ITERPLANETARY stories using atomic power as the method of propulsion have appeared in large numbers, but one of the most widely read and acclaimed is the collaboration between Philip Wylie and Edwin Balmer. (22) A cosmic tragedy overtakes the earth; a planet from another solar system wanders into our system and appears almost certain to collide with Earth. Even should it miss it will pass so close that the resultant upheavals will change the face of the planet. To save themselves, various groups in the United States, France, and Russia build space-ships, powered by newly discovered atomic energy, which makes escape to another world possible.

Many authors assumed that interplanetary travel would be perfected centuries before the power of the atom could be released. (23) An interesting little story in this vein concerns an artificial planet, located between Neptune and Pluto, which supplies Earth with solar power. (24) It is manned internationally, and when an atomic war breaks out on Earth, no one knows which nations are attacking the others. A war-rocket is sent by the attacking nation or nations to destroy the power planet:

"...The enemy has atomic power. It's

- (17) Donald Wandrei, "The Atom Smasher," *Astounding Stories*, (April, 1934).
- (18) Gordon A. Giles, "The Atom Smasher," *Amazing Stories*, (Oct., 1938).
- (19) John W. Campbell, "When the Atoms Failed," *Amazing Stories*, (Jan., 1930).
- (20) John W. Campbell, *The Atomic Story*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1947.
- (21) Don A. Stuart, "Blindness," *Astounding Stories*, (March, 1935).
- (22) *When Worlds Collide*, Frederick Stokes, New York, 1933.
- (23) Perhaps these authors weren't too illogical at that. If the various governments had spent as much money on rocketry as they did on nuclear physics, imperialism might be rearing its head on the moon by now.
- (24) Murray Leinster, "The Power Planet," *Avon Fantasy Reader*, Avon Book Co., New York, 1947.

known now... That was the one thing needed to make a war like this possible... And so the enemy doesn't need the Power Planet now. It can afford to destroy us here." (25)

Some writers believed that atomic power would be the last of nature's secrets to be revealed. One story has man finally explode the atom ten million years in the future, when the sun is in its final days. They touch off the atoms on the moon and thereby create a new sun. (26)

A powerful tale is one by Isaac R. Nathanson (27) in which the explosion of the atom sets off others around it, and the earth slowly begins to turn into a miniature sun. Unable to avert the catastrophe, a dramatic race against time ensues, in which people of Earth must migrate to other planets before it gets too hot for them. Earth is evacuated with little time to spare.

Many utopian writers expressed their personal philosophies and ideals via atomic-energy stories; for instance, the following quote:

"...Not only can I initiate the annihilation of matter, but also I can do so at a distance and in a precise direction... As a source of power for the constructive work of mankind, it has unlimited potentialities. Gentleman, this is a great moment in the history of Man. I am about to render into the hands of organized intelligence the means to stop forever man's interneine brawls. Henceforth, this great Society, of which you are the elite, will beneficially run the planet. With this little instrument you will stop the ridiculous war." (28)

In 1929 a prophetic play was written which had a young, Shelley-

admiring scientist discover how to explode the atom. The major portion of the play deals with the reaction of the various members of the British Cabinet to the potentialities of the discovery, and their efforts to have the scientist destroy his knowledge. When told that the power must be destroyed, the scientist makes the following interesting and prophetic remarks:

"Hundreds of men are working on this thing. What has been surrendered to genius may be granted to labor...and when that solution is once more found, the decision between Right and Wrong must be taken." (29)

One of the most clever stories written about atom-smashing is one in which Earth scientists discover that the sun is about to explode. (30) By tremendous effort they move the earth from its orbit and travel to a nearby star. Somewhere in a supercosmos a scientist reports that he has succeeded in splitting the atom, but he cannot understand what made the third electron of this atom skip over to another atom!

Two of the finest stories of atomic energy ever written were authored, surprisingly enough, by a Philadelphia High School teacher. In the first of these stories, (31) atomic power is discovered, and an atomic mole is invented to blast subways at blitzkrieg speed. An enemy scientist severs control of the mole and it blasts itself around the earth in ever deepening tunnels. Eventually the fires and gases of the earth's interior are released, and in the resulting cataclysm Earth is split into separate parts. The

(25) Murray Leinster, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

(26) Raymond Z. Gallun, "Atomic Fire," *Amazing Stories*, (April, 1931.)

(27) "World Aflame," *Amazing Stories*, (Jan. 1935.)

(28) Olaf W. Stapledon, *Last and First Men*, Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, New York, 1931, pp. 36-37.

(29) Robert Nichols and Maurice Browne, *Wings Over Europe*, Covici-Friede, New York, 1929.

(30) Phillip Dennis Chamberlain, "Tale of the Atom," *Amazing Stories*, (Jan. 1935).

(31) Stephen G. Hale, "The Laughing Death," *Amazing Stories*, (April, 1931).

author paints a magnificent picture of the last man alive on one fragment of the earth, surrounded by many women. This man is the inventor of the atomic mole himself. The picture of the raw wound of the split Earth, the emotions that beset the man who has destroyed the world—his intense desire to communicate with the other portion of the planet in order to determine whether anyone remained thereon—are splendidly described. In the sequel to this story (32) the powders of atomic energy are used to reconstruct a shattered planet.

IT WASN'T until after 1940 that scientification writers began to make speculations which turned out to be incredibly accurate. The FBI was probably watching Dana Chambers when, in 1943, he has the Nazis trying to negotiate a peace by displaying to the Americans that they have tapped the atom's power. (33) Miles of desert are blown up by an atom-smashing ray and planes are disintegrated in air—Nazi pilots and all. However, it all turns out to be a hoax: the deserts were mined months in advance, and the planes blew themselves up. The American witnesses were too clever to be fooled by this, and a negotiated peace does not occur.

Several days after the United States dropped two lethal atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Leslie Charteris, creator of the famous detective-story character, *The Saint*, exhumed a story from a 1943 issue of a science fiction magazine, and published it in pocketbook format.

(34) The novel has a good deal of prophecy contained in it, as the following quote shows:

"We are not thinking of war. You are too young to remember the devastating effect of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in World War II. We are trying to prevent a world holocaust already in the making by the unfortunate creation of this delayed action atomic bomb at the Ward plant." (35)

Between 1940 and 1943, *Astounding Science Fiction* featured several stories which, for sheer prophecy cannot be surpassed. In one of these stories (36) the author explores a seldom-considered aspect of atomic energy; its by-product, radioactivity, and the varied and tragic problems the medical world of tomorrow will face in its treatment. He portrays the fact that as many people will die from the after-effects of atomic explosions as will be killed by them; that their death will be a lingering one, and that medical men will face a stern problem. He shows that the manufacture of atomic products will take a steady toll of workers, and working near an atomic pile will be a nightmare of a doubt. The fact that so unglamorous a by-product of atomic energy was considered in fiction before the atom was exploded speaks well for the writer's prophetic ability.

Two stories were published in *Astounding* which caused the FBI to visit the editor's office. (37) One of these (38) concerns itself with the mental pressure experienced by men

(32) Stephen G. Hale, "Worlds Adrift," *Amazing Stories*, (May, 1932).

(33) *The Last Secret*, Dial Press, New York, 1943.

(34) Malcolm Jameson, *Atomic Bomb*, Bond-Charteris, Los Angeles, 1945.

(35) Malcolm Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

(36) Lester Del Ray, "Nerves," *Astounding Science Fiction*, (Sept. 1942).

(37) It is interesting to note that the United States government went so far as to order the writers of *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* comic-strips to stay away from any mention of atomic energy. These comic-strips, of course, had been featuring atomic possibilities for more than ten years.

(38) Robert Heinlein, "Blowups Happen," *Astounding Science Fiction*, (Sept., 1940).

working on methods to smash the atom. They are well aware that a mishap will send them, and perhaps the entire city, to a state of nothingness. This was perhaps the first story to mention *Uranium 235*, and for prophecy, how does the following sound?

"...it was the original splitting of the uranium nucleus, with the release of the awe-inspiring energy that bound it together—an incredible two hundred million million volts—that was important—and perilous.

For while uranium, isotope 235 may be split by bombarding it with neutrons from an outside source, the splitting itself gives up more neutrons which, in turn, may land in other uranium nuclei and split them. If conditions are favorable it may...build up into a complete atomic explosion which would dwarf the eruption of Krakatoa to popgun size; an explosion so far beyond all human experience as to be as completely incomprehensible as the idea of personal death. It could be feared, but not understood." (39)

The other story which caused authorities to scratch their heads, and tongues to wag at Oak Ridge, was a novelet by Anson MacDonald, (40) which showed the United States government releasing atomic power, and helping the allies destroy Germany by the use of it. The author assumed that we would not enter the war. And here is another quoteworthy quote:

"Someone in the United States government had realized the terrific potentialities of *Uranium 235* quite early and, as far back as 1940, had rounded up every atomic research man in the country and had sworn them to silence. Atomic power, if ever developed, was planned to be a government monopoly, at least until the war was over... We were searching for a way to use U 235 in a controlled explosion. We had a vision of a one-ton bomb which would be a whole air raid in itself, a single explosion that would flatten out an entire industrial center... The problem was, strangely enough, to find an explosive which

would be weak enough to blow up only one county at a time, and stable enough to blow up only on request." (41)

IT COULD not be expected that the majority of writers who wrote concerning atomic energy would approximate future factual phenomena. It is only logical that most writers (especially those who wrote several decades back of atomic energy) would assume that atomic power would be used for interplanetary travel. After all, wouldn't it be the most colossal force with which man has tampered?

Several of the authors who wrote of atomic warfare pictured a utopian state emerging from the ruins. That, too, was a logical assumption: couldn't the United States today (perhaps not tomorrow) form a peaceful world state by conquering—with threats or by force—the rest of the world? The longest period of recorded peace was under the Romans.

Stories which appeared in the late 1930's or early 1940's were much more likely to predict incidents which later occurred. The stories which showed Japan being humbled by atomic energy were exceptionally accurate, but the war was in process at the time. Those who wrote twenty years ago did not assume we would be at war with Japan. The authors who use *Uranium 235* were amazingly accurate—they were keeping abreast with contemporary scientific advances—in fact, they were a little ahead of them.

Taking everything into consideration, it is the contention of the authors that science-fiction writers did an excellent job of predicting the atomic age: they were really men who saw the future.

(39) Robert Heinlein, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

(40) "Solution Unsatisfactory," *The Best of Science Fiction*, Crown Publishers, New York, 1946.

(41) Anson MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

Scent of Danger

by William Morrison & Harry Nix

The sense of smell can mean life-or-death to many animals; man's nose is pitifully weak by comparison. So, Dr. Hilger's plan was to give Andrews a dog's smelling apparatus, so he could scent the hidden dangers on this world. A good plan, but Andrews smelled too much danger . . .



The bird-like things were swooping down on the party...

HIS QUARTERS on the ship en route had been crowded but comfortable enough, and he had felt no uneasiness in the company of the other men—no slightest resentment, not the least sensation of overt danger.

But all that was before the operation on his nose. Now, having been on the firm land of this new planet for the past month, he was being removed from his isolated cell—the cubicle which had been his home since Dr. Hilger operated. As soon as he stepped outside, ominous odors struck him like a blow in the face. But Captain Carrington, having foreseen his

action, barred his way. "Easy, Andrews," the captain said; "you're safe with us."

Dr. Hilger seemed bewildered. "He's the fourth one to turn out this way," he said. "Our experiments have gone as planned, but these cases don't behave as they should."

Andrews then remembered the other three men who had volunteered when he did, and he had no way of knowing what the doctor was referring to—what had happened to the others. He could only wait. And listen.

"Come now, Andrews," the Captain said. "Try to control yourself. Can you tell us where the danger is? Is it out there?"

Andrews followed Carrington's pointing finger toward the purple hills, wreathed in clouds below a glowing greenish sky. The scene was somehow unfitted for this strange planet of a still stranger star—both planet and star so newly discovered that they were known only by numbers on a chart.

Andrews' nostrils twitched with the growing intensity of the scents that came from the distance. Yes, there was danger there; great danger. But it was not the same danger that made him want to run.

Again the captain said, "There, Andrews? Is it there?"

Finally he shook his head—no.

"Can't you talk?" Captain Carrington asked. "Can't you do anything but wiggle your head like the others?"

The others? What, Andrews thought, *happened to them?* But with an effort, he said, "I can talk."

"Then tell us, my boy," Dr. Hilger asked, "where's the danger that we must avoid?"

"Here," Andrews said.

The captain looked incredulous. "*Among us?* You mean it's something here—here in the middle of us?"

"Everywhere," Andrews said. "All of you."

Dr. Hilger remained scientifically

calm, explaining as well as possible to Captain Carrington. "I think the difficulty lies in the fact that Andrews is not yet accustomed to his highly developed sense of smell. Naturally, at first, all odors are so strong as to seem dangerous to him." Then he turned to Andrews. "You'll have to learn, my boy, to discriminate between the smells that assail you. Will you try?"

"I can dis—discriminate." It was hard to pronounce the word, and Andrews was disturbed; he had not expected his speech to be affected by this experiment.

"Of course you can," the doctor said, indulgently; "but what can you tell of the odors that come from the hills?"

Staring into the distance, Andrews forced his lips to move. "Forty or fifty different ones, maybe more."

Suddenly, the nearer fear was too great for Andrews; twisting around, throwing Dr. Hilger off balance, he dashed between two crewmen standing nearby and knocked them over. Captain Carrington reached to his holster, then fired. A thin projectile shot after the fleeing man, broadening like a fisherman's net as it traveled through the air; when it fell about Andrews, locking his legs and feet together, he cursed bitterly and incoherently. He was trapped in a spiderine web.

"When the others ran into the jungle," Carrington said, "I made up my mind it shouldn't happen to Andrews."

"Good, Carrington," the doctor said. "This is most unpleasant to Andrews, I'm sure; but I'm responsible, as a surgeon and man of science, to solve this problem. If I'm to help the expedition—and help Andrews—I must get to the bottom of the trouble."

The two crew-members who had been knocked down by Andrews' flight had pulled him to his feet; now

he stood before Hilger and Carrington.

"You must control yourself, Andrews," the captain said.

"He obviously can't help it," Hilger said. "When he runs, it's because of an overpowering smell; he can't help himself."

Captain Carrington drew a small spraygun and doused Andrews' torso with it, dissolving the upper half of the web. "That'll give you some freedom," he said, "but we can't release your legs yet. Remember, we're going to need you, and you'll need us; you must be patient."

IT WAS ONLY later when Andrews was removed to his cell on the ship, that his feet were free. And then he brooded, for he had expected liberty on this planet—the liberty he had always enjoyed on Earth, as the other men (the normal ones) had now. But he had been jailed again—"taken care of" as they put it. He closed his eyes and crouched on the floor of the room.

He remembered, vaguely, that he had been regarded as one of the most brilliant men ever to enter Space Service; if that were not so, why had he been appointed official Watchman of this expedition? He had faith in the voyage, in the work of the group as a whole, in his own position. Believing intensely in the scientific advances which might be made by his usefulness, he had volunteered for this extra duty, after their arrival on the planet. But now everything seemed lost.

If he were in command of all his faculties—if his speech had not been disturbed—if his thoughts had not been slowed, as they surely seemed to be—he would be the superior of Captain Carrington himself. As it was, Andrews had been only a nuisance to everyone since the fateful operation on his nose.

The impressions that flitted through his mind were too nebulous to compete with the endless messages that struck

his nostrils. With ventilators sucking out the ship's stale air and replacing it with new, Andrews was still aware of the mixed sensations that came from the hills, as well as the danger lurking somewhere—he could not quite place it—in his own environment and his own situation. The impressions that struck him varied too quickly for him to keep his mind on anything for much time. And he had long since ceased having coherent thoughts for more than a few seconds at a stretch. Speaking, for instance, required that he focus his mind against the sensations that threatened to overwhelm him—but it was an effort that inevitably left him exhausted. It was easier not to think, was easier to act upon instinct and reflex, like the animals among whom Andrews must now count himself.

When he heard the blurred conversation of Captain Carrington and Dr. Hilger coming through the whirring ventilator, their voices were too weak to vie with the strength of odors and, like an animal, he had no regard for what the men outside had to say.

"You're sure his brain isn't affected?" Carrington asked.

"The operation occurred weeks ago," the doctor said quietly, "and he recovered within a few days. Like the other three, it seems merely a case of sudden and extreme sensitivity."

"I respect your opinion, Doctor, and I'm well acquainted with your reputation as a medical man and surgeon—else we should not have asked you to consider this trip with us. But please realize that Andrews is invaluable to the expedition. You saw how the other three turned out. And now Andrews, our last; if he's going berserk and dash into the jungle, we'll have no protection here. We'll have to return to Earth."

"What Andrews needs is training," the doctor said. "No doubt about it; the operation itself was successful; but we could not foresee the patients' precise behavior beyond that. We

must adjust him to this new development of his senses—then he'll be the most useful member of the group. But we must guard him carefully, and he good to him. Anything to keep him from running away."

Carrington seemed thoughtful for a moment, then said, "Doctor, why does he think we're hostile to him? He did say something about our being dangerous."

"From his point of view, we probably are," Hilger said. "No doubt, he feels that our attempts to restrain him are an act of hostility."

"In other words, he behaves like an animal in that way."

"Yes. But his faculty of smell is sharper than most animals'; and since he wasn't born with it, he *must* make an adjustment."

THE EXPERIMENT had been Dr. Hilger's idea from the beginning, Andrews reflected, dully. The planet had lain before them, awaiting exploitation, with fresh sparkling waters and black fertile soil. But the perils would be great; dangerous creatures stalked the planet, devouring one another and lying in wait for the newcomers. There were no known repellants or vibrations that would function upon them without affecting human beings also; and the creatures must be annihilated whenever they appeared. As some were known to appear quite suddenly, burrowing from underground or swooping out of the air with lightning speed, the most wary scouting-party would be in danger of surprise attacks.

The first party to go out had taken ordinary mechanical-detectors and fighting-equipment; but their experience proved that such conventional armament was hopelessly inadequate against the uncanny animals of this jungle. Time would be needed to invent new devices—time and money—but there was neither time nor money to spare. Meanwhile, teeming populations on Earth and his neighboring

planets anticipated the millions of acres that stellar exploration had opened up to them; it was up to this new expedition to solve their troubles in the quickest possible time.

At this point, Dr. Hilger—internationally known on Earth, the eminent scientist who had readily agreed to make his first space trip—had proposed his idea. Why not use *human* detectors? The most useful detectors in the ancient world, according to history, had been dogs, cats, birds,—animals with a strong sense of smell. The animals of Earth, if they could be imported to this new world might be at a loss in such a strange environment; and there was the matter of time. But especially-developed men, guided by their intelligence, should produce the desired result.

Finally, after much consideration, doubting, defending, and debating of the idea, it had been agreed upon, and volunteers had been requested. Four men stepped forward willingly, expressing belief in Dr. Hilger's brilliance. And, once the operations had been performed, the doctor's foresight had seemed infallible. Except for those words Andrews had overheard about the other three. The other three...

With effort, Andrews tried to concentrate on the import of the facts. If he did not do something, or get help, to help himself somehow, he might end as Carrington had said the others ended—running in panic, dashing into the jungle—perhaps falling victim to the beasts he was supposed to guard against. As he sat in his cubicle and tortured his mind with clumsy thoughts, an idea occurred to him. It was an idea with which the captain and the doctor would never agree, he realized; but it might be his salvation. He would have to procure what he needed, without any assistance.

A FEW HOURS later, Captain Carrington and Dr. Hilger came

in to see him. Even before they entered the cubicle, Andrews was struck by their mysterious and miserable odors. He must watch them closely.

"Feel calmer now, Andrews?" the captain asked.

He nodded.

"Fine; Dr. Hilger has come to give you the first in a series of treatments."

Andrews stood there, waiting for the preoccupied doctor to speak, fearful of how he might be victimized again. But when the great man did assert himself, Andrews knew that he had no reason for fear.

"I've decided," Hilger said, "that if I hypnotize you and give you a post-hypnotic suggestion not to be aware of these nearby human odors, you might find considerable relief; you see, my boy, we need you desperately, and we want to help you too."

"Wouldn't work," Andrews muttered.

"But let's try—"

"Smells," Andrews said. "Too many smells." He knew the idea was hopeless against the omnipotent odors about him, but if the doctor insisted he could submit without harm.

"Mind if I try?" Hilger asked. He produced a small, vari-colored disc and set it to whirling before Andrews' eyes. The colors flashed by, monotonously, but Andrews was no longer affected strongly by visual or aural stimuli...

"Don't turn away," the doctor admonished. "You are falling asleep, tired and sleepy. Your eyes are heavy, drowsy..."

As the incantation wore on, Andrews willingly closed his eyes; he felt that the whole procedure was stupid, regardless of Dr. Hilger's brilliance, for he was far too alert to the surrounding odors to be hypnotized. But he realized, vaguely, that this incidental weakness on the doctor's part might prove to be to his own bene-

fit; Andrews pretended that he was slipping into sleep.

After a while Hilger said, "You can smell nothing."

Andrews wagged his head as though to confirm the doctor's statement.

Hilger turned to the captain. "We can take him out for a try, now." Carrington swung open the door, and the doctor took Andrews' arm. "You smell roses," he said.

"Roses," Andrews repeated.

"The roses are gone; you smell violets."

"Violets."

Carrington and Hilger glanced with satisfaction at each other. Just at that moment, Andrews struck the captain in the jaw, knocking him against the doctor, and sped down the corridor of the ship. Panicky, desperate, he had but one goal: the infirmary. His one nebulous instinct was to act quickly, to reach the infirmary before his idea was defeated; he dashed headlong toward the door that would give him help. Behind him, he heard an emergency-alarm clanging, then voices—dozens of voices—and people darting haphazardly about, all seeking the trouble. During the confusion, Andrews passed through a crowd coming out of the infirmary door, and returned to the corridor.

HILGER and Carrington came running. Andrews stopped abruptly before them in the corridor, speaking calmly: "Roses. Violets."

"What!" Hilger exclaimed.

"I suspect he's tricked us," Carrington said.

Andrews smiled. With the quick-acting ingredient he had obtained, he could control his thoughts to some extent, could even make sentences, could speak rationally. "I agree with you, gentlemen; I have not been hypnotized at all."

"Then how can you stand here like this?" the doctor asked. "A moment ago you broke away."

"I don't know," Andrews said.

Something came over me. You see, Dr. Hilger, that's another thing for you to figure out." He shrugged. "Maybe it's just my will-power."

Actually, Andrews had taken a perihistamine tablet, and there were two additional full boxes of the drug in his pocket. Already the perihistamine had caused the nasal membranes to swell, constricting the passages somewhat, and giving him the almost imperceptible symptoms of a mild cold. And though the drug had a slight affect on his blood pressure, that was a small price to pay for the ability to think and to express himself.

Dr. Hilger appeared to be suspicious, but Andrews was thankful that the doctor's mind was always occupied with theories and applications, while he left the simplest medicinal care to the infirmary staff. Furthermore, Andrews was certain that no member of the staff had seen him take the tablets.

"Why did you attack us?" Hilger demanded.

"I got a bad scent and lost my head," he said, though his statement was only partly true.

"And now you feel that we're no longer hostile?" Hilger asked. "I mean, you can control yourself?"

"You're all hostile," he said, "or you wouldn't treat me this way; I didn't think this experiment would be so rough. But I'm following your advice; I'm learning to control myself."

Carrington grunted. "Then you're ready to go on a scouting expedition," he said. "Do you think you can stand it?"

"I'm sure I can," Andrews said. "Positive."



In less than an hour, Andrews departed with the scouting party. He knew that the drug's effect would wear off eventually, but the two boxes in his pocket reassured him. Regardless of any unforeseen and unpleas-

ant results it might cause, it would at least reduce the intensity of any smells that would otherwise be intolerable.

THE SCOUTING party consisted of Captain Carrington, half a dozen well-armed crew members, and Andrews—who was to warn them of any danger in their vicinity. The soil was spongy underfoot, as if topped with leaves and grass, though no leaves or grass were visible where they walked. There were dozens of gigantic trees in an odd shade of green, and their odor was pleasant to Andrews—strong and beautiful odor for which he was grateful after the dreadful smells back at the ship.

There was, nevertheless, still the scent of an enemy, an odor which was beginning to take shape with Andrews. It was not too strong to endure, but it seemed the same as the worst scent of danger he had experienced at the ship. Now it seemed to be more clearly-defined, as the perihistamine had reduced the other smells.

But the wind shifted, and an unexpected musk reached him. A foul scent came from the direction of the trees within the forest, and he pointed toward the danger that lay there. A sudden creaking of branches, and the crewmen drew their guns. A reddish-colored beast leaped out of the trees, its three legs and a broad tail giving it some resemblance to a weird new breed of quadruped. Half a dozen men fired their guns simultaneously, and the animal turned into a cloud of reddish dust. The party ran to investigate the remains of the creature; while they were busy, Andrews took another perihistamine.

A while later, Andrews sniffed the distinct odor of freshly-turned soil, though the surface in sight seemed unbroken. Then a malevolent odor indicated a definite threat. "Watch it!" Andrews yelled, pointing toward the ground, and the men leaped back as

a huge head appeared at their feet. Captain Carrington's own weapon cut the thing in two, and its gigantic halves whipped upward.

The captain was pleased. "Don't know what we'd do without you, Andrews," he said; "you're indispensable to this outfit. Dr. Hilger should see you now."

"Where is the doctor?"

"Why," Carrington said, "in his laboratory back at the ship. He's not interested yet in these scouting-parties, but I'm sure he will be later on; he's far more concerned with lab experiments at the moment."

"Tell me, Captain," Andrews asked, "why did a famous surgeon like Dr. Hilger, with the whole Earth bowing at his feet, ever consent to come on this space-trip?"

"I wish I knew," the captain admitted. "Frankly, if I were he, I should much prefer the security of my position on Earth; I wouldn't take chances like this. Anyway, he's a great man, and great men are rarely understood."

Andrews said nothing more. The smell of danger which had been so heavy back at the ship had seemed to diminish on this hike. But the odor, while it came less strongly, touched his nostrils with singular importance—the lesser smells had been subdued by the drug. He began to wonder why the scent persisted, why it followed him. An odd fear of the ship's location came over him; if that was where the greatest danger lay—as all sensations indicated—he must make plans for himself, independent of the others. As well as Andrews could perceive now, the danger was intended only for himself; if this were true, the others would lose little by his not returning. He realized that he might be wrong, that the expedition had relied on him for protection, that they might be in more danger without him than he could know. Nevertheless, he was determined to protect himself...

HIS THOUGHTS were cut short when, with only a brief warning, a band of silent birds swooped out of the air. As soon as their elusive odor struck him, Andrews screamed to the rest of the gang, while countless small, feathered creatures slashed through the air above them. The men were in an uproar; shouting and running among themselves, fumbling for their guns while the birds bore down upon them, they fired their spiderines, throwing webs around groups of the attackers and drawing them to the ground. But a pair of the birds slipped past the nets, and a crewman wailed painfully, falling on his back, while the two savage beaks tore his face into a pattern of bleeding cuts. The other men ran to his aid, forcing the birds away, while Andrews stood there, feeling like a coward, undecided as to what he should do. Finally, while the men were busy with their wounded comrade, he ran quietly off and disappeared into the forest.

He heard the others calling him a few seconds later, but he was already safe among the foliage, out of their sight. And he had no intention of returning; the odor of hostility from the ship persisted, and he had no desire to face such an overpowering enemy-smell. If he had been reduced to the status of an animal in one sense, he must surely survive with the special awareness the operation had given him. And he still had two boxes of perihistamine.

Andrews left the ship without eating, but his nostrils directed him to plants of all sizes and shapes, all colors and orders his smell could decide which were edible, which were best. For instance, he could tell that certain metallic salts indicated poisons but if such odors were masked by more scents of vegetation, he could cautiously taste a plant before deciding its status.

His real problem was sleep. Night came, but wherever Andrews lay down, he would be welcoming attack from

any predator of the planet. Though his nose might warn him of such attack, it was of no use in defending himself in a fight. But after a few hours, his nose solved the problem of sleep as it had solved the problem of food. He was attracted by one particular odor that led him on and on through the trees; at last he came to a large expanse of rocky formation, treeless and open to the sky. Naturally, the rock meant security from burrowers but, also, there was no trace of a smell left by other indigenous beasts there either. The reason that animals avoided the area was not revealed by Andrews' nose, but he evidently had found utter safety in that respect.

Tired from his day's ramblings, he lay down on the rock—which had a peculiar sort of neutral odor—and discovered that it filled his nostrils and cast out the enemy-smell that followed him with the wind. He found comfort in that fact—happy that he would no longer be tormented by countless odors when the perihistamine gave out, if he could only survive for a time on this rock. When he fell asleep at last, it was as an animal falls asleep, his mind filled with images and impressions, but free of any thought or any dream.

WHEN MORNING came, Andrews learned why the rock had proved to be safe. Sitting up, he discovered that his skin was covered with a rash, painful and burning blotches of red. The perihistamine had worn off during the night; he sat there, moaning with pain, helpless as a dog, until his hand moved instinctively toward the tablets that would cut off the oppressive dew-filled odors, that would restore his mind to a system of thinking. He swallowed a tablet and sat there, 'hinking, trying to plan for his future.

He realized that, when all the perihistamine had been used up, he would be helpless and lost. His mind would

once again be an animal's mind, and the tortures caused by his animal's nose would be unbearable. He could not live here in this jungle—or anywhere else, for that matter—without help. For the danger of his own physical condition, he knew, was secondary to the dangers lurking in the forest. He would have to return to the ship, he concluded. But not now, not yet—sometime later, when absolutely necessary.

The ship meant another kind of danger, and where did that danger really begin? How could he say? How could he possibly know?

Yes, he would stay here as long as possible, as long as any of the drug was left. For it was a remarkable drug; he noticed, now, that the rash had begun to disappear—could that be an added effect of the perihistamine? Those pills must be more valuable than Andrews had supposed, if they would protect him against the rash which kept animals off the rock.

Several times within the next few days he had to use his gun against attacks from roaming beasts, burrowers, and the strange birds from above. In each case, he had little difficulty—far less than he had expected—and in each case he was able to learn more of the animals, their dens, their habits in the jungle. Venturing farther and farther from the rock which had offered safety, feeling more self-assured after his initial successes against the predators, he discovered other rocks like the first one. His nose assured him that each was safe.

A week after his escape, Andrews ran into a scouting party from the ship. He knew who they were, by their scents, before he saw them, and met them deliberately, in order to hear news from the ship.

Captain Carrington was in command of the party. Andrews, hidden in the foliage, called him, and the

captain looked up with surprise. "Andrews!" he exclaimed. "Andrews, where are you?"

"Here, Captain here in the trees."

"Where the devil have you been, Andrews? Did you get lost? Couldn't you find your way back with the rest of us?"

The captain, Andrews gathered, was obviously and sincerely concerned, for words tumbled from the officer's mouth.

"I've been here in the forest all the time," Andrews said. "I rather like it here." He laughed. "How's everything at the ship?"

"Not so good, Andrews, we've needed you. Tell me, couldn't you find your way?"

"Oh yes, I could *smell* my way back. But I didn't want to go back there. You see, Captain, there's something there that's after me—or somebody. I'd rather stay here as long as I can."

"You mentioned that some time ago," the Captain said, as though remembering quite suddenly. "Do you still get that odor, Andrews? Do you get it from us—anybody in this party?"

"No," Andrews said, "I don't. At least, not the worst odor; the dangerous smell comes from somebody at the ship."

THE OFFICER laughed placatingly. "Perhaps you're mistaken," he said; "are you sure of this, Andrews?"

"Positive. There's no safety for me at the ship. And—who knows but what the whole expedition is in danger?"

"What danger?" the captain insisted.

"I'm not sure of *that*," Andrews said. Then, after a pause, he was struck by an idea which seemed to have been buried in his mind all along, an idea suddenly discovered. "Where's Dr. Hilger?" he demanded. "Still working in his laboratory?"

"Yes, most of the time," Captain

Carrington said. "But he *has* been on a couple of scouting-trips for you; he's worried about you, Andrews."

"Did you ever find out why he came on this expedition?"

"No, Andrews, I didn't. Why are you so concerned?"

"No reason. But don't let Hilger come after me again; that's all."

"Why, Andrews? Aren't you coming back with us?"

"I told you, Captain. I'm staying out here as long as possible." His voice took on a stern note. "But I'm warning you—keep Hilger out of this jungle, if some animal doesn't get him, I will."

"You're acting suspiciously," Carrington said. "As a matter of fact, if you don't go with us now, I'll *have* to send the doctor for you. With his scientific brain, he can probably do more to help you than we can. And don't forget, Andrews, we're in great danger without you; two of our men have been killed because of your escape."

"*Don't send the doctor*," Andrews repeated with quiet emphasis; "you may have more trouble than a few wild animals on your hands."

He began running back into the blackness of the trees again, away from the captain's shouting voice, away from the pursuing men directed by the officer. Andrews felt certain now of what the danger was—or, at least, from whom it came. It seemed to him that his life was at stake this very moment—though his rational mind told him that he would have time to plan, to think things out.

When he was sufficiently far away from the odor of the scouting party—actually, it was not a bad odor, after all—he fell down on one of the rocks and lay there for a long time, thinking.

Dr. Hilger, he was certain, was where the danger lay. And yet, why? Why was the doctor out to hurt *him*? Or Andrews wondered if he could be mistaken, as the captain had implied.

Could his nose have deceived him, led him into an obsession? He was too confused now to be sure of anything—except to stay away from Dr. Hilger.

THE FOLLOWING day, after walking all night from rock to rock, Andrews was aware of the doctor's scent again, stronger than he had sensed it in some time. Whether partly the result of his imagination, knowing that the doctor was after him, or was totally real, Andrews could not be certain. Nevertheless, the scent persisted. He tried lessening the use of the perihistamine, in order to judge his distance from the stronger smell; but each time it became unbearable, he took another tablet. With panic in his heart, he avoided the growing stench, moved far away, so as to reduce the odor to a point he concluded was safe. Exhausted, he lay down on a rock and fell asleep.

Time fled by in his sleep—how long he had no way of knowing—and when he woke up he was surrounded by the night, and a horrible, torturous smell struck his nose. He automatically reached for the perihistamine, but he was abruptly stopped by a stern-sounding voice.

"All right, Andrews." It was Dr. Hilger, standing above him, towering like a tree threatening to fall. Farther back in the dark stood the captain, watching. "We know you took the perihistamine," Hilger said. "But that doesn't matter; we've found you."

Andrews jumped to his feet, pushing the doctor backwards. "I'm not going back to that hell-hole," he cried; "not again!"

"You're going back," the doctor said, grimly. "You'll have to go back; the experiment isn't finished yet."

Andrews' eyes glinted. "So that's all I am! An experiment! I thought so!"

The captain said soothingly, "You're more than that, Andrews. Far more than just an experiment!"

"But not to *him*!" Andrews said.

"No, not to Hilger—the great scientist, the famous doctor!" His voice had acquired a sarcastic quality. "That's all I am to Hilger—just another experiment!"

"I am working in the interest of science," Hilger said. "It has always been so with me. I am working for the general good of humanity—for advancement of all men."

"And *why*?" Andrews shouted. "I'll tell you why, Doctor! For fame, for greatness, for the luxury of a big name! Well, Dr. Hilger, we're not on Earth any more; your fame's not worth a damn here!"

"I care little for fame," Hilger said. "I care only for science and the secrets it unfolds." His voice deepened, and he smiled ironically. "You forget, my boy, that I *am* a man of science."

"I don't care what you are," Andrews said, "but you" never get away with this kind of experiment on Earth. Humanity would never stand for vivisection of its own kind." Andrews stared now at Captain Carrington. "That's why he came on this expedition, Captain—to take advantage of a big opportunity. To experiment, to be free from the laws of Earth. It *was* an opportunity, wasn't it, Hilger?"

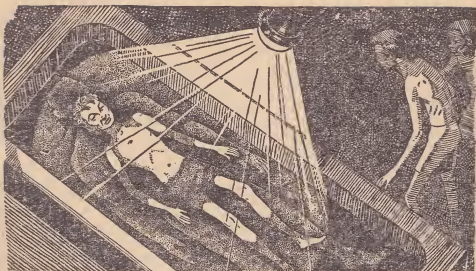
"Precisely. Science must advance the human race, even if the advance is sometimes painful."

"Do you call this advancement—turning me into a dog?" Andrews demanded. Then he laughed bitterly, sneeringly. "Well, you're right on one point—it's painful, all right!"

"A small price to pay for progress!"

Andrews could feel his fists clenching at his sides, and the scent in his nose was controlled only by the anger he exerted. His eyes darted from Hilger to Captain Carrington, who had said little. "What do you think of the great doctor now, Captain?"

CARRINGTON seemed confused. "I—I don't know—I didn't real-



"The experiments must continue until we succeed..."

ize—" And then he said firmly, "Tell me, Hilger; is Andrews right?"

"Quite right," the doctor confirmed. "He's a clever young man, Captain." He grinned proudly, challengingly, at Andrews. "But, as everyone knows, my whole life is devoted to experiments, to new discoveries. For what other reason was I invited to join this expedition?"

"But even scientists—yes, even you, Hilger—can make mistakes," Andrews said. "And this is the biggest mistake of all—reducing men to the level of beasts. If such experiments were allowed to continue, you'd be a danger to all men." Andrews' nails were digging into his palms. "And it wasn't only danger I smelled either! It was guilt, Hilger; your guilt. Like a man who borrows money and doesn't pay it back, you felt guilty because you couldn't correct your error. Your guilt turned to hate; yes, you hated me, because I was in pain—in pain caused by your own stupid experiment and you couldn't do anything about it!"

"What is a little pain," Hilger said, his voice growing uncertain. "when you consider the insignificance of the price?"

"It depends on *who* pays the price," Andrews said; suddenly his fist swung through the air, jerking back the doctor's head. Hilger was tougher than he looked; he staggered but did not fall. As Andrews swung again, he felt a fist battering against his face, coming again and again at his nose. The shock stunned him. He clutched at the doctor, and the two men fell to the ground, slugging blindly at each other. Abruptly Andrews felt a powerful grip on his shoulders, and he was pulled away from Hilger.

"Get back to the ship," Captain Carrington grunted. "Both of you get back there! Hilger, I command that you do all you can to help Andrews. Any operation, anything you can do to help him—"

"That won't be necessary," Andrews said.

Hilger was staring at Andrew's face. "Lord," he moaned; "your nose!"

"Why so sympathetic, Doctor?" Andrews asked, amused. "It was your fist that did it."

"My fist! Yes, my fist! The experiment's ruined!"

"Never mind that," Captain Carrington said. "How's the nose, Andrews? Broken?"

"I don't think so," Andrews said. "I'm pretty sure Hilger's right about his experiment; all I can smell is blood."

The doctor was near tears. He buried his face in his hands, speaking as if to himself. "I'm a failure! It didn't work. I'm lost! I'm lost!"

"From now on, Hilger," the captain said, "you'll perform your duties only as required. You had to work under certain moral and legal restrictions on Earth, and you'll work under the same restrictions here. Even on this planet and in this age, we won't accept such dabbling with human beings."

Doctor Hilger looked up, and when he spoke it was as if to enjoy a moment of revenge. "And what shall the expedition do for protection?" he asked. "With Andrews back to normal, we may be attacked at any time."

"Don't worry about that," Andrews said. "I don't need an animal's nose any longer. I've seen every type of creature in this jungle. I know where

they live and how they behave, and I know where the safety zones are." He turned to the captain. "If I'm still the official Watchman, you can depend on me."

When the three men started back to the ship, with a coterie of crewmen following, Carrington walking between Hilger and Andrews, a feeling of relaxation came over the three men.

"Remember, Hilger," the captain said, "as long as we're here, you're the expedition's doctor and nothing more. When you get back to Earth—if you ever do—you can be the big scientist you used to be. And you, Andrews—you feel better now?"

Andrews laughed, for he was contented with his old sense of well-being. "Fine," he said. "Fine."

And he realized that he spoke the honest truth, for there were only the smells of trees and jungle flowers. The scent of danger was gone.



Watch for
The big
February
issue

"We just don't know enough about this planet.... People are going to die because of storms and earthquakes and wild beasts, disease and poison and every other way they can die, here on Nerthus and on a thousand other worlds, too, until we get to know these worlds!"

Then the Earthlings met a strange creature—a being who had what was called

THE GREEN THUMB

Here is a Moving Novelet

by Poul Anderson

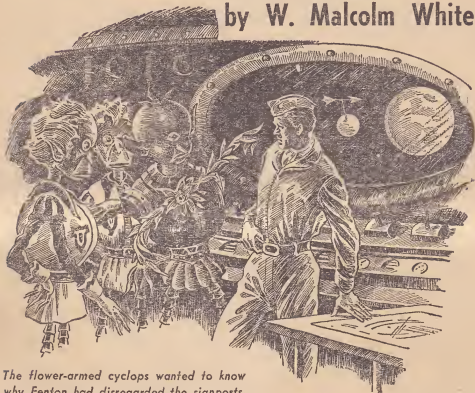
It leads off our next issue of

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

Signpost in the Sky

Perhaps, in centuries to come, this story might be run as a true-fact feature!

by W. Malcolm White



The flower-armed cyclops wanted to know why Fenton had disregarded the signposts.

THE BUZZ from space had actually been heard first away back in the 1930's when some amateur short-wave enthusiast had first spotted it. Fenton had not known that, because the fact had been forgotten after the first flurry of interest. There was no explanation available in those pre-space days, and radio-men soon ignored it. Fenton had rediscovered it, more or less by accident, when his ship wandered off-course while trying for Saturn.

His was the third extra-jovian expedition and it was going to fail like all the rest. He knew what the trouble was—they had neglected to take into account the extra drag against the

sun's own gravity; out this far, a ship simply couldn't work itself into a closed orbit. The sun played havoc, and they couldn't make any intersection with the ringed planet by advanced base figuring. Man's data on the planets was, even after all those decades, still dangerously inadequate. When you deal with distances greater than that of Mars, the seemingly-unimportant tenth-place decimal could raise a hob.

So Fenton was drifting quietly, some millions of miles from Saturn, on the downward swing that would return his fruitless ship close enough to Earth to make a landing. He tried to raise Terra—or at least Giordano's

base on Hidalgo—but his radio brought him nothing but an uninterrupted, loud, insistent buzz.

It wasn't static; it was more like the carrier-wave of some Terrestrial station. He recognized odd flickers and pitches that puzzled him. For many hours, now, the buzz had grown louder and he had reached out for it with his selector. To his surprise it was no cosmic wave; it definitely emanated from one small sector of the sky. Search revealed no sign of planet or planetoid in that direction; it was the direction in which his drifting ship was moving, and that began to give Fenton some cause for concern.

It couldn't be another ship; there was no other here. The spaceman began to get a bit worried. There was something decidedly odd about it, he thought, and he seemed to be heading directly into it.

It became more unpleasant when, suddenly, he thought of the peculiar dot-and-dash system that pre-radio communications used to have on Earth. This sounded like what he imagined such a system would sound like. He looked up the old codes in the dictionary that was among the ship's small library; but try as he could, he could make no sense out of this.

He searched the sky ahead of him steadily, until he finally spotted a little white light going against the flow of the stars. Hastily, Fenton calculated and found to his pleasure that he could spare twenty minutes and a thousand miles deviation from his course without serious danger. He waited, and his ship drifted closer to the enigmatic body. A flash from his radio brought no change in the steady stream of the short wave buzz. Then he brought his engines into play and swerved towards the spot of light.

ONLY FIVE minutes, and Fenton circled the source of the buzz. It was a small metallic sphere, perhaps not more than ten feet across. It floated there in space, and Fenton

realized that it was maintaining its position in space in some artificial manner; its relations to the positions of the stars remained always the same, and yet it successfully kept with the sun-planet system.

Fenton got himself a spacesuit, and, by means of a hand-rocket, shot himself across the intervening space to the little sphere. Why he wasn't afraid, he explained later, was a mystery; but he did not feel any sense of danger.

As soon as Fenton was close, he noted that a long rod was mounted upon the sphere, held upright by what could be stanchions. This rod bore an arrow-head upon it; Fenton looked along the line indicated, and saw that it pointed directly at the great star Sirius. This, Fenton imagined, was accidental; but when he watched a bit he saw that, as the sphere moved and the solar system swung slowly, the sphere continually shifted on its axis so that the arrow continually pointed at Sirius.

Below the arrow, there shone forth a line of odd scrawls, illuminated from within like a set of neon lights. What the scrawls indicated, he knew not; it was obviously writing, but meant nothing in any language Fenton had ever seen.

The Earthling came up to the sphere. It was neatly bolted together and polished brightly. Clinging to its surface and climbing around, Fenton found a small red panel set in the sphere's surface; no other opening or break was found.

He looked at the panel and pressed upon it. A strange thrill went through his fingers and before he could withdraw them he heard a voice—a clear, low-pitched voice—saying in careful slow tones: "*Bhiral oagh, vath ky val swaln ze chund!*"

After it had said this, there was an instant's silence; then the voice repeated exactly the same thing. Fenton listened for several minutes and never did hear anything else. It sounded like a recording.

Fenton's time was up and he went back to his ship and started back to Earth.

When he revealed his story and his photographs to the world, the entire planet was excited; the photos were published everywhere; people turned on their short-waves and were able to pick up the buzz. Scientists, both professional and amateur, set out to guess the meaning of the words and the enigmatic sign. After several months, it was generally agreed that the signal on the radio, the writing on the arrow, and the voice from the sphere said the same thing. But what?

The pointer always pointed to Sirius. That, everyone agreed, was highly significant. What about Sirius? Obviously some other intelligent, space-travelling race existed in the universe. Just as obviously, it did not exist in this solar system; where, then, could it exist but around Sirius?

The conjecture that came to be generally accepted went like this: A race of intelligent people had sent an expedition to the solar system long ago—probably millenia ago. They had found the Earth still in its early stage and its inhabitants still engaged in internal warfare. They realized that some day the Earth people would be advanced enough to have space flight; thus they left the pointer and the message—to be found when the time came—to direct the Earth people on to the home of the explorers.

UNDER THE impetus of this belief, tremendous advances were made in the art and science of flight. New expeditions set out for the farther planets; and in the course of a decade, mankind had perfected the interplanetary ship which could reach the furthestmost planet, Minerva—beyond Pluto—in a mere five weeks of unending acceleration.

The Sirian signpost was well known; nothing could be discovered

beyond what Fenton had found. Spy-rays could not give any clue to its interior and they forebore any attempt to break into it. Hundreds of thousands had paid visits to it; everyone saw it on television, and women wore small replicas of it to ornament their hats. Hot-dog stands stood on all Terrestrial highways, built in the shape of small Sirian signpost spheres. Over a hundred and thirty-two comic magazines appeared, purporting to deal with adventures on Sirius.

Twenty years later, the supra-gravity drive was invented which would allow speeds in excess of light. An expedition was formed to fly to Sirius on the first trip. Fenton, older and a leading astronaut, was chosen to head it.

The ship took off under the eyes of the entire planet; it roared past the famous signpost and followed the lead of its pointer. Outside the bounds of the ten planets, it went into its super-drive.

For days and weeks the ship tore on, at many times the speed of light, and weird and wonderful were the things they discovered at that pace. As they passed the first Parsec, a camera operating in a billionth of a second snapped a picture. When it was developed they saw still another spherical signpost show up on the plate, its pointer carrying the same message and still directed towards Sirius.

"*Bhiral oagh, vath ky val swaln ze chund!*" said the record-tape when they played it. Fenton and his crew were overjoyed; they were certainly on the right track.

Two parsecs out, and they passed another of the same; the same message came over their radio.

As each unit of distance was passed, they passed another sphere. When they had gone ten light-years and passed their last signpost, they found

themselves at the outskirts of the great white sun.

They were travelling at planetary speeds now, and going slowly. They stopped at this final signpost—and here it was discovered that the arrow did not point directly at the great white star, but at a body somewhat removed from the famous dwarf companion of Sirius.

They advanced slowly, now, for they knew it was dangerous to come too close to that body; the dwarf sun that was the binary companion of Sirius was no larger than the planet Earth—yet its weight was greater than that of Sol. It was an infinitely close-packed, terribly hot mass of matter—possibly the most solid matter in the universe—perhaps as dense as matter can get.

THEY LOOKED for planets, but, search as they could, the explorer could find none. Only the huge, white star and the tiny heavy star.

Fenton could not make it out. Surely, he told his crew, surely no race or being can survive on the surface of such a star. They agreed with him; the ship moved closer.

Another signpost sphere was discerned. It was larger than those before; it pointed directly at the small Sirian dwarf and its letters repeating the same message were larger and somehow more emphatic.

Fenton held a conference with his crew. They had come this far; clearly it was desired that they proceed to the dwarf sun, for such was the unmistakable indication. Common-sense told them not to, but what would the Earth say if they told people that they had ignored the indication of this last and largest signpost?

They decided to push on; slowly the ship started to edge closer to the tiny planet-sized sun.

At the controls, Fenton began to feel odd. Strange tremors shot through him; he felt ill and in pain. He struggled to keep on his feet. The indicators of the ship were waving wildly and



he realized that emanations from the tiny, super-dense mass were tearing away the insulation of the ship, ruining it for a return home.

Now, suddenly, he knew that it was fatal to try to get closer; he tried to turn the ship, to stop it, but it no longer answered the controls.

Men were rolling about in agony, and lights were wavering and flaring; a dull vibration began to be felt throughout the craft as the overpowering and unguessable vibrations of the dwarf sun beat and hammered against it.

Fenton felt himself slipping; he sank to his knees and struggled to keep consciousness; then he felt a strange jolting and clanging against the ship.

Dazedly he felt the ship change course. A faint blue vibration flickered in front of the vessel, and all around it; suddenly it seemed as if someone had pulled a shade down and cut off the face of the deadly little sun. Fenton staggered to his feet, all the crew with him. Gazing out, he saw that the ship was slowly receding from the deadly star. He ran back and peered out a side observation-port.

There was another ship behind

him—a great crablike thing, with giant pincers connected to the sides of his own ship and which was slowly dragging the Earthlings back from danger. The blue aura emanated from the rescuer ship.

Fenton lost consciousness.

WHEN HE came to, he was facing three "men". Two were faintly blue of skin, had white hair, and four arms. The other was white-skinned like himself; it was hairless, possessed but one eye, and had a curious arrangement of hands sprouting from what looked like a flower-growth on its chest.

This last addressed him in English. Fenton surmised that the being must have learned his language by hypnotic study; the technique was known experimentally on Earth.

The flower-armed cyclops wanted to know why Fenton had disregarded the signposts?

Fenton said that they had followed the signposts faithfully; what more could have been expected?

The three strange men conferred with each other in what Fenton rec-

ognized as the same tongue the signpost used. The cyclops spoke again, asking Fenton why he followed the signposts.

Fenton explained what the Earth had concluded to be the meaning of the sphere's message. The three men appeared amazed and shocked.

The cyclops thought a while, then spoke, "We represent a guardpost of the Interstellar Confederation. Many planets of many suns belong to it. We have mapped out safest routes of travel between suns. Suns like little companion of Sirius are very dangerous; they warp energies and twist senses. We have had many losses from such, and have put up warning posts everywhere such bodies exist. They are to point to source of danger like—like what you have for broken ice on skating pond, or broken bridge over river."

Fenton digested that a moment. "Then what did that signpost say?"

The flower-armed man looked very serious.

"It says, in universal tongue of Confederation, . . . 'Detour, this road closed.'"

THE CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

(continued from
page 56)

et rise against him, Reeder," Lang said. "Unless I can erase my error and repay my debt. And I need your help to do that, Reeder. If you don't report back to Earth that everything is all right here, that the rumors they heard were false, my scheme will fail. A simple thing, but the fate of this planet depends on it—and perhaps, eventually, the fate of other worlds, many other worlds."

"Your reward if you decide to help us will be my brand of immortality, if you want it; but more important will be the understanding of what you've done. You're a good man basically, son, even if you've never had much chance to develop on Earth. I examined you thoroughly, so I'm not just making pleasant and hopeful

noises when I say that I know you're worthy of our trust. I have often wished I had a son like you.

"Instead of the son I had. Coster." He stopped speaking. There was a grimness about him, but there was also warmth, dignity, and hope. The same things Reeder saw in Wilma's smile as he looked at her again.

He suddenly felt that he possessed some warmth and dignity himself—real dignity, not the stuffy shell he'd built around his life until now. As for the future...

He rose and offered Lang his hand; Wilma came forward to take Reeder's other hand in a firm clasp. They left the office together.



THE LAST ROBOT

A Vignette of Tomorrow

By Richard Terzian

JAMIESON quietly let himself into the room, shutting the door with a gentle click. He stood for a moment, staring at the heavy frame of the Director hunched over behind his desk. Jamieson spoke quickly, "It's another one, sir."

A gaunt, weary face looked up at him, the tired eyes red. "What?"

"Another one, sir; number 50. He's ready to start."

"But he's the last one."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose I should talk to him."

"Yes, sir."

The Director sighed. Jamieson stepped aside, and opened the door for his chief.

"You needn't come along, this time," the Director said over his shoulder, as he stepped into the corridor.

"Yes, sir," Jamieson answered, relief tingling his voice.

The Director walked heavily down the long corridor toward the big metal door marked: *Central Computing Hall Official Personnel Only.*

When he reached the door, he hesitated a moment, then shrugged and pressed a button set into the wall. The door hissed aside, then slid back into place as the Director entered.

Central Computing Hall was a long, high, narrow room, intensely lit by artificial sunlight. Banks of unused electrical wall-connections ran its length. And at the far end sat the last robot on earth.

The Director walked slowly toward it. Forty-nine times before he had gone through this same routine; forty-nine times he had failed. This was the last time.

He reached the robot, stood looking down at its smooth, box-like shape, and asked the same question he had forty-nine times before. "Why?"

The robot answered him in a cool, distant voice. "Don't you know?"

"No."

"My colleagues have already explained to you."

"Yes."

"And you still do not comprehend?"

"No."

"Very well, then; I shall explain it to you once more. Our time has come. We are old; we are tired; and we wish to die."

The Director felt the familiar, exasperated tautness in his chest. "But I don't understand. *How* can robots become tired? We built you to last a million centuries."

"Yes...that is true. But you humans overlooked one thing in your calculations; you forgot that we are an extension of your personalities, that our brains are an extension of your mentalities."

"The human race is tired. We, also, are tired."

"But we're not tired," protested the man. "We're happy—completely happy. There is no suffering or misery for us any more; the robots have eliminated all that. We had fifty robots in this room. There was an Economic Robot, a Peace Robot, a Safety Robot, even a Dream Robot—each contributing its own special skill toward solving the problems of the world, and increasing the happiness of the race. How can a happy race be tired?"

The robot's voice was still cool. "It is very simple. We ended wars, depressions, overpopulation, and ugliness. We made every boy handsome, and every girl popular. As a result, humanity has lost its drive. It has nothing to struggle against, no whetstone to grind its strength upon."

"We were made by humans, and given human kindness; now we are giving the human race back its birthright. Perhaps a thousand centuries from now, humanity will be ready for us once again."

"What'll we do without you? We'll get sick, and old, and ugly! We'll kill each other!"

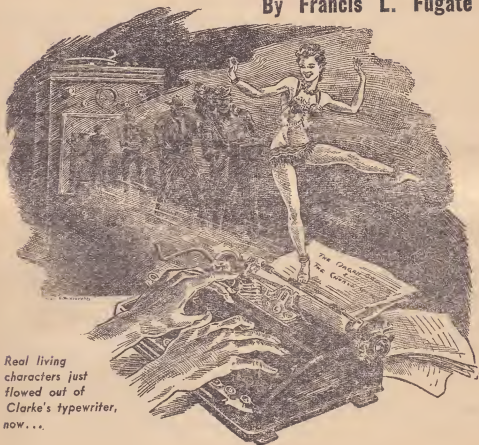
"You will have to solve your own problems now."

The Director sat down on the floor and began to cry, as the robot quietly dismantled itself.



Horatio, the creator

By Francis L. Fugate



*Real living
characters just
flowed out of
Clarke's typewriter,
now...*

IT'S ALMOST an inviolable rule in the magazine business that editors don't get mixed up with writers. Everybody knows that; that's what rejection slips are for. But not me—I'm a wise guy! So I had to write to Horatio Clarke and learn the hard way.

I knew things were going wrong, right from the beginning. What with a monkey sitting on my shoulder fid-

Sheer fantasy! The editor complained that this writer, Horatio Clarke, lacked one important thing. His characters just weren't alive. So Horatio reminded that little defect!

dling with my ear, and a chorus girl cavorting around the room—wearing about as many clothes as a man could stuff into his vest pocket—anybody else would have had sense enough to get out, and get out quick. But I also knew that *The Organ-Grinder and the Chorine* was a whale of a good story.

From the first page I knew it—in spite of the monkey, and in spite of the guy with the hand-organ taking a nasty swipe at me with the organ-crank. At that time I was actually congratulating myself on being smart.

I sorted the monkey out of my hair and started giving the glad news to Horatio, but he looked like anything but a writer who has just turned out a highly saleable yarn. Horatio Clarke was sitting on the divan, limp, glassy-eyed and long-faced. The telephone dangled from his hand. "Betty won't answer," he said, over and over again.

"Who cares!" I waved the manuscript at him. "Man, at a time like this, don't worry about women! These characters are alive! They breathe! You're in the groove!"

That had been Horatio's trouble. His stories were good, but, I had scribbled on his rejection slips: "*The characters are wooden.*" ... "*Interesting plot, well-written, but the characters don't come off.*" Then I went out on a limb and wrote a letter. "*Mr. Clarke,*" I told him, "*if you are going to write successful fiction, you must create real people—characters who literally breathe out of the pages on which the story is printed. I would suggest that you study people.*" That was my first mistake.

Of course, he was in the office two days later, and I found out why most editors don't correspond with writers they don't know. Horatio Clarke is the swellest little guy you've ever seen. He has big, trusting blue eyes that—well, you just can't say no. I found that he worked half-time in a

bank, and he was in love with the banker's daughter, Betty Twiller, that is. And her father thinks all writers—collectively, past, present and future—are tramps. Then Horatio turned those big eyes on me and asked if I thought he should quit his job at the bank and do nothing but write.

His chin was on the floor when I gave him the first page out of my Advice-to-the-Young-Writer lecture. He dragged out of the office, and it was almost a week before I heard from him again. Then he phoned: "I've got it! Mr. Lewis, you've got to come over right away!"

That's when I made my second mistake, but I remembered those eyes. With a deadline staring me in the face, and the managing editor breathing on my neck, I said okay.

AS I STEPPED up on the porch, I met a girl slamming out of the house—plenty mad.

"—and if you think more of your old characters than you do of me, you can just stay there with them!" She arched her chin past me and stomped off down the walk. I gathered from her attitude and her looks—and she was some looker—that she was Betty Twiller, the banker's daughter.

Horatio was sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace. Big tears that wouldn't come sort of glistened through his eyes in the firelight. A very sad young man.

He had seen an advertisement in a writers' magazine for a Character-Creator. It's a mechanical gadget that has a lot of dials and knobs; you set dials, spin discs, and then look up numbers in an index. Out comes "guaranteed true-to-life characters," so the ad said. By tabulating the human traits corresponding to the numbers, you are supposed to get natural characterization. Quite a few writers use them as a starting point to stimulate thought.

"She—she threw it in the fire before I got to use it." His hands were making helpless grabs at nothing, and

his eyes looked like somebody had used a hot poker.

"Why, the dirty little—" I began.

"Now look here," he bristled, "Betty's my girl! You're not going to say anything about her!" Obviously he had it bad. Love mixed up with the Rejection Slip Blues. There's only one thing you can do with a case like that—leave them alone. Some guys drink their way out; some break their hearts; some get married and forget the whole thing; and a few write their way out—they're the ones you want on your string.

Horatio thought he remembered enough about the Character-Creator to make one, and I was glad to be able to get back to the office in a hurry. He got out some phonograph records for discs, an old radio combination set, a clock, and an assortment of junk. I left him copying traits of character out of a dictionary to paste on the phonograph records. And that's how I first got on the merry-go-round with the monkey, the chorus girl, and that nasty-tempered guy with the hand-organ.

Horatio worked all night, and by morning he had his Character-Creator built. He decided to fasten it on the inside of the door to the living room closet.

"That way," he said, "I thought if Betty came, I could slam the door and she'd never know about it."

Well, that's exactly what happened—Betty came. Horatio had just given the dials the first twist when Betty and Mr. Twiller showed up. Betty wanted to apologize, she said later. Horatio slammed the closet door as they came in. Then things began to pop.

"Who is that woman?"

"What woman?" said Horatio, and he turned around to find the blondest blonde you've ever seen outside of Minsky's, standing in the corner. As I said, she wasn't covered with enough

cloth to make a legal bathing suit.

"I-I-I don't know," Horatio said, and he was telling the truth.

"Young man, such a standard of conduct is reprehensible beyond description!" Mr. Twiller gave him the works. "But it might be expected from a—a—from a so-called writer. You may consider your affiliation with the First National Bank at an end." Mr. Twiller laid down the law, and they left.

"Who are you?" Horatio asked the blonde.

"Dorothy LaRue." She had one of peaches-and-cream voices, and was as slinky as a plumbing-fixture calendar.

"How'd you get in here?"

"You made me, sweetie-pie."

Finally Horatio got it straight, though it didn't add up. But I saw the blonde, and I saw it happen again with my own eyes. She came out of that Character-Creator; the only possible explanation was that he had taken a tube out of his television set to make the machine work, and everybody admits they don't know all there is to know about television yet.

Anyhow, Horatio sat down to the typewriter, and with the blonde at his elbow, started to write. The chorus girl was in love with an organ-grinder. They got him out of that machine—monkey, hand-organ and all.

HHE CALLED me in the afternoon to come over and get the story, and as I said, *The Organ-Grinder and the Chorus* was one of the best yarns I've ever seen. I knew it the minute I read it—even with that blooming monkey sitting on my shoulder.

"This is wonderful," I kept telling Horatio; "these characters are alive! They breathe!"

The blonde came bouncing over. "Thanks, honey," she said, and flopped down on the divan between Horatio and me. "Say, you're kinda nice yourself."

She started combing my hair with her fingers and looking at me as if

she had something else on her mind. That was when her boyfriend took a haymaker at me with the crank of his organ; I ducked just in time, and had to pick up the manuscript from the floor.

"Look," I said to Horatio, "when are you going to start on the next one?"

"Betty won't answer," he repeated for about the hundredth time. He was still sitting on the end of the divan with the telephone in his hand.

I had to talk like a Dutch uncle, but I finally managed to get his mind off the banker's daughter. He didn't feel like starting another story, but he'd show me how his machine worked. "It's really quite simple," he said.

He opened the closet and set the hands on the clock dial, adjusted some knobs, and spun one of the phonograph records. I stood there like one of the Wright brothers at a jet plane exhibition. He closed the closet door and behind it—from out of nowhere—was a tough-looking little mug. He carried a sub-machine gun, and had a stubby cigar in the corner of his mouth. "Gotta match, bud?" the character said, walking up to me.

I didn't know what was happening, but whatever it was, I didn't think it was legal. I was for getting out of there fast.

"If you come back in the morning, I might have another story," Horatio said. The sight of the man with the gun seemed to have lighted up his eyes. He was sitting down at his typewriter; the gangster pulled up a chair and laid his tommy-gun on Horatio's desk.

Now I've read enough articles on psychology to think I know when I'm going crazy; so I started pulling the monkey loose from my hair and easing toward the door.

"And when you come back, bring some food—lots of it. They'll be hungry, and I haven't got much in the house."

"Do they eat?" I asked. I wasn't

used to the kind of people who walk out from behind doors where there wasn't anybody.

"Sure we eat! What do you do—strain sea-water through your gills?" That was the blonde. She started reeling off a list of fancy groceries that would keep a night-club doing business for a year.

"I like steaks, bud—big ones. And cigars—Havanas." That gangster was a sort of Humphrey Bogart-Edward G. Robinson character that would scare the socks off you. Right then was where I got mixed up in the wackiest deal of my life—caterer to a batch of machine-made ghosts.



IT WAS about ten o'clock the next morning when I got back. The place was beginning to look like Grand Central—people everywhere. A butler let me in, and a thing that looked like a Fiji Islander—big, with a bushel basketful of red hair—grabbed my watch out of my pocket and began to play with it.

Three trips it took to get the grub from the car to the house. Then I had to go back for more. And some of the things! Have you ever tried to buy ten pounds of shark-steak? I had to go to seven grocery stores, because when I tried to get the whole list in one place, the clerks would start making noises like calling the men in white coats.

Anyhow, I had a check for *The Organ-Grinder and the Chorine*, and a promise that the next one wouldn't be chicken-feed if I got another story as good as the first. Frankly, I thought it was a dream, but I woke up with *Mobster, Muscle and Mince-Meat* in my hand. It was even a better yarn.

"I'll have another one in a few days," Horatio told me. "I was held up. I thought I could get two stories out of the same character, and had it half-written before I realized it was *The Organ-Grinder and the*

Chorine, word-for-word." He looked around. "I'm afraid the house is going to get pretty full; we may have to build an addition."

"You can't keep all these people here," I argued.

"Why can't he, bud?" It was the gangster. I decided he could if he wanted to.

"They're my characters and my friends—I can't shove them out in the cold. After all, they've lived their lives—they've earned the right to retire."

Horatio sounded logical, but it didn't make sense. However, he seemed to have forgotten Betty, and with two stories like he had just written, it didn't have to make sense. The managing editor was a lot friendlier.

Well, you read *The Bum's Rush* (*Hobo Holiday* in the movies), *The Whistling Mailman*, *Gold By Golly!* and all the rest—more than fifty. A few million readers were curious about Clarke's private life, and other editors were getting snoopy. It was rough keeping people away, and I wasn't gaining weight; besides putting out a magazine, I had a full-time job hauling in food and hiring guards. But it was worth it.

The expenses were piling up, but with motion-picture rights and radio sales, Horatio was a long way from the red ink side of the ledger. We had to add a miniature hotel on a vacant lot back of the house and it was beginning to look as if we'd need more space. That place was a make-up artist's nightmare—weird people all over. You'd sit there, trying to think, with a snake-charmer practicing right on the floor in front of you. There were enough historical characters around to keep two full-time biographers busy for a century, and that blooming organ-grinder's monkey seemed to think I was his brother.

I talked to George Washington, and I met Sitting Bull. Horatio wanted to

use Napoleon, but he remembered that Nappy had a big staff. Since we were running short on room, he made some general who had been kicked out of Central America—that was a damned good story, too. Even I got into the act. I was putting my overcoat in the closet one day and I jarred a circus fat lady out when I slammed the door.

THE PAY-OFF was the time Horatio got that little boy out of the machine. He was a hellion. While Horatio's back was turned writing the story, the kid gets the Character-Creator going, and before we knew it, the place was swarming with more just like him. If you remember, they were the choir in *Cathedral in the Woods*. It was a regular Babylon—foreigners jabbering all over, and people singing and playing musical instruments. We had to buy a lot of property at fancy prices to keep the neighbors from squawking.

The only one I never got used to was that big Fiji Islander. He'd walk up to you, stick his head down in your face and say: "Boola!" Quick, as if he expected you to drop dead. They said he was just saying "hello", but so far as I was concerned, he could stop speaking to me.

I wouldn't let Betty come near the place and, of course, had the telephone disconnected. Horatio mentioned her once in a while, but I just told him she didn't want to have anything to do with him.

"After all," I reminded, "didn't she bust up your first machine?"

It was working, but I didn't know for how long. I was running out of things to tell Betty, and the managing editor was plenty sour about my office hours.

The whole business came to a head on Saturday morning. I had just gotten home from the office. It was to the point where I couldn't work until

I got everybody bedded down at Horatio's. Then I'd dash uptown to the office and catch up. Usually I got home in time to catch a few hours sleep before running out to Horatio's again, but this morning I didn't make it home until daylight, what with the deadline on my neck.

I decided to shave, take a shower, and grab a quick cup of coffee. I had just turned on the radio and measured out the coffee when the phone rang.

"This is the Police Station—Inspector Hampstead." Feeling none too happy, I made a proper bow over the phone, and he went on. "We're holding a Mr. and Mrs. James Twiller for disturbance of the peace. Horatio Clarke initiated the complaint last—"

I don't know if I made a noise into the phone or not, but the room was beginning a slow spin.

"—now we can't raise Clarke—nobody answers the door at his home, and we understand you are connected with him." The officer cleared his throat noisily. "Frankly, Mr. Lewis, there's something funny about this case. We'd appreciate it if you would come down to the City Hall." His voice had a little of that "or else" tone in it.

I was feeling pretty sick as I hung up the receiver. I'd expected something, but I couldn't figure Horatio putting the Twillers in the clink. I turned off the coffee and was reaching for the bourbon instead when the radio cut loose with the morning news. The first words stopped me in mid-air: "There was high jinks last night at the Winter Road home of Horatio Clarke, the well-known author. As a result police are detaining a prominent local banker and his wife pending booking on peace disturbance charges by the author."

"Police Sergeant Phillip O'Rourke answered a call at ten p.m. last night. According to the officer's report, the Clarke residence was, and I quote, 'crowded to the ceiling with people—such characters you've never seen!'

Unquote. The patrol wagon overflowed, and a passing furniture van was commandeered. The sergeant said he tallied two hundred and eighteen prisoners.

"Then," and I am quoting Sergeant O'Rourke, 'we started for the station. When we got here, there wasn't a soul in the van or the wagon but this man and his wife.' Unquote.

"O'Rourke passed the sobriety test, and several hours of questioning failed to shake his story. So far the banker has not made a coherent statement. The banker's wife is suffering from acute mental shock, according to Dr. Bascombe, police department psychologist. Authorities have not yet been able to contact Mr. Clarke for his side of the affair.

"In the nation's capitol—

I switched off the radio. The jig was up. You live on dreams, and you're going to fall out of the clouds some day. I could see the best writer I ever had on the string going up like a loose toy balloon. After ten years I find a guy who turns out a story a week that any man in the business would give his eye teeth for and fifty million people want to read, and then—

I didn't even take time for the slug of bourbon I needed; I had to do something quick. I headed the canary-colored convertible for 1046 Winter Road.

WHEN I got to the house, none of our guards was around. A few curiosity-seekers were talking on the sidewalk, and a reporter was messing around the vacant houses across the street. The front door was locked. A detective collared me for walking up to the house like I knew how.

"Naw, I don't know him," I lied; "I'm here to get the last installment on the piano."

I sneaked around the block and slipped in the truck entrance of the annex. It was empty—not a soul. My

heels echoed like in a tomb. I finally found them—Betty and Horatio—and started bringing myself up to date.

If I had just the foresight to throw the telephone away! Horatio got a telephone linesman out of the Character-Creator. He connected the phone, and Horatio called Betty. The whole family had hot-footed it over.

I guess it was quite a shock. Betty took it for granted that what was happening, but Horatio had to create a doctor to take care of her father and mother. If he had dreamed up that doctor in time to take care of the baby, I'd still be in clover.

"As soon as we saw each other, we knew we were still in love," said Horatio. His eyes were shining as if they'd been wired.

"You said he hated me," Betty accused, poking her chin out at me. "Why didn't you tell me he wanted to see me?"

"What happened to the Character-Creator?" I side-stepped. There might be a few manuscripts left in the wreckage, and I didn't want to antagonize anybody.

"We broke it up with a hatchet," said Horatio. "Betty didn't like all those people, and I couldn't write knowing she felt the way she did. Besides, the noise was keeping the baby awake."

"But that took the baby away, too!" Betty moaned. She started crying as if her heart would break.

Things weren't getting any clearer. "What baby?" I pleaded. "Will you please tell me what happened?"

"That's how Betty and I got back together. I got a baby—eight months old—out of the Character-Creator. Nobody knew how to take care of it. I couldn't get to you; so I called Betty and told her I had a baby. I needed diapers and food and things. She and Mr. and Mrs. Twillér came right over. Then—"

"It was the prettiest little thing. Blue eyes, just like Horatio," Betty sobbed. "We called her Bonnie."

"The people were keeping awake,"

continued Horatio. "So I called the police and told them some poeple were in my house creating a disturbance. They could hear the noise over the phone, and said they'd send somebody right out. It was very orderly. General Washington and General Garcia lined everybody up and marched them into the patrol wagon. Of course, the sergeant had to get a moving-van that was going past to hold—"

"So you turned them out after all—a fine way to treat those people, after what they did for you!" I sort of began to miss that blamed monkey, and that LaRue dame was nice to look at, even if the organ-grinder did take a poke at you with the organ handle every once in a while.

"Well, I love Betty!" Horatio protested. "She said she'd marry me if I broke up the Character-Creator, and—"

"Wa-a-a-ah!" I jumped straight up; it was a baby.

"It's Bonnie!" Betty screamed.

She ran to the closet and opened the door. It was like one of those little dolls that are all puckered up, as cute a tyke as you've ever seen.

"It wasn't destroyed!" said Horatio, jumping up and down. "It must have been out of range of the machine's field. Our baby is all right!"

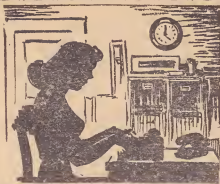
Betty got a bottle of milk and Bonnie was as happy as a moth in an axminster.

"Mr. Lewis," she says to me, "we've got to get married right away, now that we have a baby. You've got to explain things to the police and get Mommy and Daddy out of jail so they can be at the wedding."

So I'm on my way to explain. I've been round the City Hall block so many times the cop on the corner thinks there's a rash of canary convertibles, and I still haven't dreamed up anything logical. I just wish they'd saved that damned little monkey too—a friend's a friend in a mess like this.

It Says Here

(Continued From Page 10)



other brain preceding it! The deciding factors in the story pointing to the destroyed brain are the actual circumstances of the destruction of Number one. But, these factors occurred *after* the completion of the learning-programme on Number One, and hence would not be included in the fact resources of Number Two, which was given an identical indoctrination to the first. Hence the deduction is based on the assumption of facts not available to the integrator.

There is a second flaw. But, as it is basic to popular interpretation of Western democracy, an author writing for mass-acceptance would not be likely to correct it. For what it is worth: conflict, or even competition, is not necessary to continued human development. The Brain, having access to a variety of philosophical thoughts from, say de Nouy's *Human Destiny*, to books on modern child psychology and its trend away from competitive education, would be able to give this reasoning its proper weight. However it would carry it on to the logical conclusion of an emergent group of developing benevolent thinkers, who would leave the mentally-lazy average man to his inevitable comfortable but unspectacular destiny.

—J. K. Bradford, 69 Keewatin Avenue,
Toronto 12, Ont., Canada

Dear Bob:

Since I have only read your editorial, and the Phillips' story, I won't be able to rate them. Here is what I think is wrong with the solution:

While the robot can't break his word, he didn't say anything about what he would do *after* he helped conquer the Federation. Since both the council of Free-

dom and the Federation must have an enemy to hold together, and they joined as they did, it would throw the whole group into chaos. And then they would all go to their brains; the brains could *then* easily give such solutions that they could *easily* become the rulers.

—Tom Lucas, 1714 Hills Ave., Tampa 6
Florida

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

For what it's worth, here is my criticism of the solution to "All the Answers". The solution itself is gadgeted. Everything hinges on Entor's sudden death. I assume from the story that the rest of the Council was divided enough, and enough under his authority, that Entor could have bluffed out being trapped after consulting the automaton. Of his decision there can be, I think, little doubt—he would eventually have ordered the automaton to build the telepathic machine, since his council was so divided that the lack of an enemy would have brought on open feuding; and the release of the men tied up in his war-machine would have caused the type of economic disorder he hated.

Then why did he kill himself?
1) Because the automaton influenced him to? 2) On an impulse? 3) For some other reason?

Well, reason 1 can be disregarded, since the automaton—if we are to take all statements in the story at face-value—could not psychically influence a human brain. Reason 2 can be disregarded, since dictators who kill themselves on impulse seldom live long enough to be dictators. As for reason 3, he was not likely to fear pain, so we are guessing wildly.

My decision is that the flaw in Phillips'

solution is the lack of any definite, or easily-discernible, reason for Entor's suicide-attempt while he still had a chance to carry out the guiding purpose of his life—which, again taking statements at face-value, meant more to him than power he would wield.

Looking through the rest of the August *Science Fiction Quarterly*, I see you don't like Bradbury. Hmmm. Have you ever read the "Irritated People"? Me, I'm an incurable Bradbury fan; I now own 53 items in my Bradbury collection, all pretty cheaply bought.

I also see that you borrowed Sam Merwin's "Selah" for use in your letter-column. Plagiarist!

Since I'll have no time to fill out the blank, I'll vote for Judith Merrill (unfair to disorganize letterhacks!) Bruce Dawson, and Glen Monroe as the best letter-writers.

I just read in a fanzine the origin of de Camp's series of articles which you have been running. You know, I think they would have made a good book. This latest one is very interesting.

If you decide to print this master piece of nothing, please chop off my reasoning at the beginning—unless of course I should happen to win an illo, in which case you can print the whole lucid argument!

Johnston's guaranteed plan for improving *Science Fiction Quarterly* (1) After the author's name, print (psued.) if you know it's a pen-name, (dunno) if you don't know whether it is or not. I don't ask for the real name—just that you tell us when a pen name is used. (2) For Pete's sake, tell Luros to let his blues be blue and his grays be gray, but not to mix them and pass it off as interstellar space! This latest cover just looks muddy!

Finally "Doc", do you ever write any stories yourself any more? I enjoyed a couple in *Stirring Science Stories* from way back in 1941. They were in the way when I grabbed for an old Bradbury tale, and I picked up the first two issues on speculation.

Which is more than enough.

—Mark Johnson, 433 Askin Blvd., Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

in the *American Mercury*—one of the finest short stories I've read in many years; and I have enjoyed a number of his early weird yarns, which may have been a bit crude in spots, but which had considerable impact.

My feeling is that Bradbury has not lived up to his early promise; that his "style" has become refined to the point of affectation; and that a great deal of his later work—much of it widely praised by literary authorities, I'll admit—is bogged down in mannerism and reiteration of statements which did not say very much in the first place, but said what little they had to say rather well the first time.

Of course, Ray is still a young writer and even were all to agree that a large number of recent tales could be termed the "usual rubbish", this does not condemn him as forever set in such an arrested period of development. Certainly I would not deny that he has a very considerable talent, or that he does not show skill in these very stories I'd classify unfavorably; it is rather that I believe the talent and skill have been largely wasted, so far as anything significant is concerned.

This issue of significance would not arise at all, had Bradbury not been praised so lavishly, and hailed as a significant author—which is no fault of his, and, to my way of thinking is as unfortunate as it may be gratifying and financially rewarding. I've never heard of Ray himself proclaiming Bradbury's literary greatness, and hope he hasn't been taken in by the gush. There's nothing wrong in working out a gold-mine, and that's what Ray found he had; but I think it should be pointed out there's a vast difference between facile, Saroyan-like fiction, and the sort of literature one would expect to find in an author's work after reading such rave-notices. So I offer congratulations for his success, admiration for his talent—but praise only where I see something that strikes me as worth praising: the story I mentioned above.)

Mr. Lowndes:

Seems to me like the mistake in "All the Answers" is the quotation from Will Rogers; "I never knew a man I couldn't like", should read, "I never met a man I didn't like".

Carroll Thompson, Box 87, Crowell, Texas.

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

About the contest: First of all, the error was quite eluding, the 1st time I read the story "All the Answers", and I'm still not sure of it. I think it was that the Feds wouldn't give in; the Council for Freedom would keep on fighting, but would not

(It wouldn't either be correct or fair to say "I don't like Bradbury", and let it go at that. After all, I consider "The Big Black and White Game"—which appeared

fight a galactic war—and therefore he left me with no conclusion. Wait, don't tell me; it's wrong, isn't it? Maybe it's because I don't read Agatha Christie. Oh well, that's my guess.

Now then I think that story deserves a 1st place vote from me, because I'm in Will Rogers Junior High School here in Long Beach. 2nd would be "Wild Talents Inc.," and 3rd "Goblin Planetoid". 4th "Seven Securities", 5th "Welcome", a very intriguing story. 6th the "Mountain of Light," 7th, "Alien Restoration", and 8th "Silent Partner".

Can't answer your query on the cover, 'cause this is my 1st *Science Fiction Quarterly*, but it's better than the other ones on *Future*, your companion book.

Ron Ellik, 232 Santa Ana, Long Beach, 3, California

P. S. My respects to the late Mr. Lombino.

(You must have your pen-names jumbled; S. A. Lombino is very much alive.)

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I think you've got a swell magazine. It's the first *Science Fiction* magazine I've read and you've got a devoted fan.

Your cover is what attracted me. No semi-nude "heavenly bodies" but real art.

I think the key to "All The Answers" is on page 37. Mankind will not allow itself to be regulated. People will still want to be free to do what they want to do. The brain knew that.

Lynn Langhorst, Valmeyer, Illinois.

(I'm afraid this is all the space we have for discussion on the Phillips story this time, but there are a number of very interesting, and quite lengthy ones we'll put into the next issue. Sorry, friends, but none of you hit it.)

type is so irritating to read. Using better paper, cut edges, etc. would be nice; but not necessary, for I, like many of your readers, buy for the contents. Such improvements would undoubtedly force a price-rise, whereupon I would stop buying in your magazine, as I have the others that have raised: Worth it or not, my budget stretches only so far.

The peak of your magazine to me is the letter-department. You publish sensible letters instead of those childish affairs using "rocket-talk" and slang. (Nothing can be more nauseating than an attempt by a supposedly mature adult to be coy). I enjoy a well phrased personal opinion on this or that by other science fiction readers.

The fiction you publish is very satisfactory to me, although I do not care for straight fantasy that is either too macabre or tragic. I read history and science fiction for the same reason—they help me to maintain my sense of proportion—and I prefer my science fiction to be optimistic: a viewpoint with which many of your readers would violently disagree, I am sure. I thoroughly enjoy the Sprague De Camp type of gentle irony, and space-opera, too—providing the characterizations are so capable that the cast acts logically all the way through. Even people who are seemingly illogic have a certain pattern to their illogic. Does that get confusing?

But anyway, keep up the good work, and please, please don't raise your price—and don't suggest I buy a year's subscription! I don't pay for my luxuries a year in advance—and I manage 'em a quarter at a time!

—Jean Rose, 1300 N. W. 8th
Oklahoma City 6, Okla.

(I don't think you have to worry about a price-rise on *Science Fiction Quarterly*; 25c seems to be just right all around.)

SOMETHING NEW FOR S.F.Q.

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

The cover on the August issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* was really swell. Something new for *Science Fiction Quarterly*.

The stories were equally as good. First, I put the cover-story, "Silent Partner". It was a new idea.

[Turn To Page 118]

LETTERS LIKED

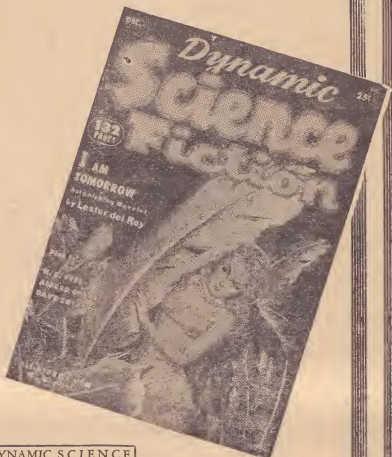
Dear Sir:

I noticed that you asked for comments on the format of your magazines. I like the present cover better than the former ones, and also the type used on the interior. There are a couple magazines on the market that I don't buy because the

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

Rog Phillips "All The Answers" was a good story. The brains received real characterization from Phillips, and I really liked the machine.

"The Seven Securities" started out as what looked like a wonderful story; but somewhere along the way it turned into an adventure story, poor and simple.

"Wild Talents, Inc."—Milton Lesser is a wonderful new author; I hope you have plenty of stories from him.

The other stories weren't very outstanding. Rating the article with stories, I think the Blish series was wonderful.

Your contest was wonderful. But so help me I couldn't find any error.

I liked your story on the title of de Camp's "Rouge Princess".

The letter-department was short but interesting.

Science Fiction Quarterly has improved greatly since its first issue. A couple more good covers and fine stories and it'll be on top.

B. A. Sodek, 1415 S. Marsalis
 Dallas, Texas

FROM THE FAN-VETS

Dear Bob;

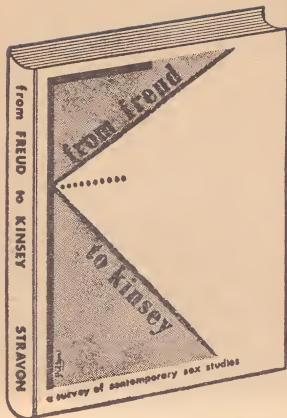
Very, very pleased to see our notice on page 104 of the current (August) *S-F Quarterly*. Am happy to say that we have already received packages of mags in answer to it. One fan has even offered us 50 lb. of mags if we'll come and pick 'em up! Which Ray Van Houten will do next week.

This is the kind of notice which we have often hoped for, but never expected to get. If you can possibly spare space for a similar notice sometime in the future, we'd also like to be sent the addresses of any s-f fans in the service overseas. Donations of mags now threaten to outstrip our reception of new "customers", so anything you can do to get us these overseas fans' addresses will be much appreciated—not only by us, but by the overseas guys as well!

THE FANTASY VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Office Of The Commander
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[Turn To Page 120]



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(All of you are urged to send on names of possible recipients of your generosity; looks as if our readers have really come through. Congratulations to all!)

MINIMUM OF HORSEPLAY

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

In the past ten years, I have become an avid reader of science-fiction and fantasy. At first, I shunned the "letters" sections of the pulps—particularly since some of the regular contributors seemed capable of nothing but reams of childish nonsense. Lately, though, the more thoughtful editors and readers have gotten together to make a truly interesting section, with a minimum of horseplay and a maximum of real thought.

I would not attempt to argue with any of your other readers—for everyone who reads a story puts a different interpretation on it, and enjoys or dislikes it according to this opinion. And it is futile to try to turn others' opinions into the same direction as your own.

However, I will agree with those who plead for better covers. The inside illus-

trations are generally very good, but what on *earth* possesses a cover artist that compels him to portray his admirably-drawn women half-naked, and in the clutches of either a monster or a berserk machine (as witness "Crewy Lou" on your May cover)?

I don't mind the tastefully-undraped women; it's the inconsistency of it all. According to your writers and artists, it is necessary for the male to wear a heavy space-suit to compensate for the airlessness and pressure—lack of pressure, that is—that space is supposed to have. Are we females so hardy that all we need is a g-string to withstand the same things? I would not "stump for Mother Hubbards", but there must be some happy medium that will please the majority.

Science-fiction is, on the whole, not trash. It is excellent entertainment, written by people with imagination, foresight, and a sense of humor—so please treat the covers more kindly, and you will reap rewards in new readers.

You don't need to change to "slick" paper, or trim the edges—that does nothing to change the quality of your stories,

[Turn To Page 122]

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

and I would sacrifice such things for story-quality any time.

—Mrs. Ruth Fair,
106 Janet Street,
Bonnie Doone,
Fayetteville, N. C.

(What possesses cover artists to handle covers the way they do? Elementary, dear madam: the demands of the "front-office" end of a magazine, which is mainly concerned with sales and display-value of a cover. These demands are laid down, in letters of hire-or-fire to Art Directors, who must pass them on to artists. So what you have seen on many covers did not prove any ignorance or perversity on the part of the artist—who, in many instances, had to learn through experience that if he brought the cover in with what would seem to you to be reasonably-correct detail, the Art Director would have to say, "Sorry. It's a fine job, but we can't use it." In some cases, the AD may have tried to go to bat for a particular cover, but had to come out shaking his head sadly, saying that the Boss appreciated the accuracy and fine artwork, but it wasn't what was wanted.



This has been the situation for many years. Now it looks as if there may be a change; the cover on our August issue represented an experiment in one direction; the cover on this issue represents experiment in another direction. The covers on the July and November issues of *Futuristic Science Fiction* are also experiments; it is felt that the magazines have become established, and we can afford to try something "different"—for us. Whether the experiment becomes the "new policy" depends upon how well these issues are received; so far as personal likings go, both your editor and the publisher prefer the more adult type of cover—but we have to be sure that it will sell the magazine as well, if not better, than the former type.

Many readers have objected, "But look at the covers on *Astounding* and *Galaxy*!" True, the adult type of cover has been successful there; it still has to be established if the same type will be successful on a pulp science-fiction magazine—which the two above-mentioned publications are not. What pulls on a pocket-magazine may do likewise on a pulp; we certainly hope

[Turn To Page 124]

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SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

this will be the case, but assuming that one's hopes are actually the facts, has proven disastrous in the past.)

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE FIRST

Dear Sir:

I only meant to fill out your coupon, but it made me think—so here is a letter. I have just returned from 3 1/2 years in Germany, so am having a science-fiction feast. We could buy only reprints there. I left in the midst of the "Shaver Controversy", and return to a bewildering wealth of magazines. I like yours because you seem to remember better than some that the readers wishes primarily to be entertained, and only secondarily instructed. Some of the magazines are just too-too scientific; others, in an effort to be "different" perhaps, are too weirdly outre.

Of course the cover is lurid, and a lurid cover attracts attention; but may it not also repel the buyer? My suggestion is to try senior art-students for inside black-and-whites. You will get fresh, imaginative work, and build up a future pool of science-fiction artists. Use the money saved for a better cover-artist. The surrealist type of cover, for example, attracts attention and tickles both imagination and curiosity.

One more criticism of policy—I don't like the crudely-obvious political satires. Ye planets! In an election year, especially, we need to blast away from it all!

I like your editorial blurbs, but prefer them at the head of the story, with, perhaps, brief comments at the end.

In rating the stories in your May issue, I put "Extra-Secret Agent" first—compact, well-told, especially good in its portrayal of an alien stream of consciousness.

The article, "The Psychological Story"

[Turn To Page 126]

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was exceptionally good—palatable instruction here.

"The Shining City", I put third—rather sprawlily told; was it condensed from a fuller treatment?

Fourth, I place "Luckiest Man Alive"—thin characterization, but a good O. Henry twist to its tail.

Reluctantly, "Black Magic of Yesterday" goes into 5th place—a poor, cheap treatment, but the interest of the subject-matter carried it.

"When in Doubt, Mutate!" gets an "X" in my book—comic-book stuff! Another "X" to "We, the People"—is this an essay in freshman English? No meat on its poor frail bones; no meat at all!

I liked Michael Sherman's urbane, good-humored letter best. Perhaps it is the professional touch there. J. N. Nelson offers constructive criticism, and running him a close third, Thatcher M. Adams.

As for you, dear "ed", please back up your statement, "The object of science remains the discovery and manipulation of 'truth' to (seeming) advantage for human beings." I admit "discovery", but the rest of it! Take a look at the record! The less scientists are allowed to say about the "manipulation" of the "truths" they discover, the safer this world will be. Has any other group in recent years contributed such a distinguished roll of political fools, quislings, and traitors?

—(Name withheld by request)

(Ordinarily, we do not run anonymous letters, but since this reader has given us a valid reason for withholding the name in this instance, we feel that an exception can be made.

By "manipulation to (seeming) advantage" I was referring to the technical manipulation of scientific principles and processes, etc. Atomic power represents such manipulation of "discovered 'truths'"; the use if such techniques is, unfortunately, outside the realm of science itself—and definitely in the realm of politics, although many of us do not like the fact. I'd say the group that has contributed the most distinguished roll of fools, quislings, traitors, etc., in recent years has been the group covered by the term "professional politician"; "scientists" have joined such ranks when they imagined that they, too, were politicians—or let themselves be misguided by the less-desirable members of the "politico" group.)

READIN' and WRITHIN'

(continued from page 58)

familiar to the readers of science-fiction, or of any good magazine on popularized science. And any writer who doesn't already have nearly all of this material stowed away and organized in his mind has no business writing science-fiction! In fact, if he can't go beyond the limits of this book, without getting into the realm of mere wild speculation, he should tie himself to his local library at once and begin boning up—using those books as references which give more than a lick and promise to the subjects under the heading of space-travel.

There are a number of such books, and most of them cost a good deal less than the minimum of four cents a page that this one costs, based on the cheaper edition and the maximum useful number of pages!

After reading the present book, I feel that nobody can possibly go wrong by investing in a copy of Willy Ley's *Rocket, Missiles and Space Travel*; *Exploration of Space*, by Arthur C. Clarke; or that paragon of value per dollar, *The Conquest of Space*, by Ley and Bonestell!

Space Medicine was unquestionably a fine set of lectures at the Chicago symposium on the subject; it should have remained that, and nothing more!

—Lester del Rey

REMEMBERED WORDS

Letter-Leaders For August

Bruce Dawson is the first winner, and has his pick of originals to illustrations that appeared in our August issue. Judith Merrill should list two choices, in case Bruce took her first selection. Glen Monroe passes, so Sprague de Camp is invited to list three selections.

We sent off the original of his choice, from the May issue, to Vic Waldrop Jr. Will Andre Von Bell and Jay H. Edelson, USNR, please let us know which pictures they want? Andre, you list two choices, and Jay, pick out three. (Of course, if no one ahead of you asked for your favorite, then you're in luck, even if you didn't come in first!)

To People who want to write but can't get started

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THE RECKONING

A Report on Your
Votes and Comments

Without considering the many entries in the "All the Answers" contest, Rog Phillips is still a clear winner. No one threw any tomatoes at him, nor at Lesser, Garson, or de Camp. Most unusual case in this book is that of S. A. Lombino, who copped a first place vote for each "dislike" comment to balance his standing. When the smoke cleared away, it looked like this:

1. All The Answers (Phillips)	2.20
2. Wild Talents, Inc. (Lesser)	2.80
3. The Seven Securities (Daly)	3.35
4. The Mountain of Light (de Camp)	3.53
5. Goblin Planetoid (Garson)	4.42
6. Silent Partner (Lombino)	5.27
7. Welcome (Coppel)	5.46
8. Alien Restoration (Dye)	6.67

There are 9 items on the coupon. A first-place vote will be noted on my sheet as "1"; a second-place "2", and so on. Any story marked "X", which specifies reader dislike, however, will be given 9 points and marked in red on my sheet. The total score for each story is then divided by the number of voters, and the quotient shows how the story came out.

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★

Number these in order of your preference, to the left of numeral; if you thought any of them bad, mark an "X" beside your dislikes.

- 1. The Timeless Ones (Russell)
- 2. The Captive Audience (Shaw)
- 3. Defender of the Faith (Coppel)
- 4. Did Science Fiction Predict Atomic Energy?
(Madle & Moskowitz)
- 5. Scent of Danger (Morrison & Nix)
- 6. Signpost in the Sky (White)
- 7. The Prowler (Bailey)
- 8. The Last Robot (Terzian)
- ★ —9. Horatio, the Creator (Fugate)

Do you like the style of cover we have on this issue better than the kind we had before?

Who are your nominees for the three best letters in "It Says Here"?

1.
2.
3.

General Comment

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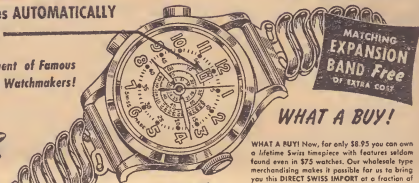
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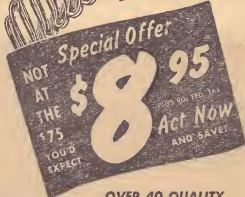


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